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*By Ellen Key*

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The Century of the Child
The Education of the Child
Love and Marriage
The Woman Movement
Rahel Varnhagen

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Die Einfalt spricht: ich sage dir, der Gott
sorgt Nicht beschäftigt;
Die aber sucht, ist nicht der
Mensch wurdig

1817

RAHEL VARNHAGEN IN 1817.

FROM AN ENGRAVING IN THE LIBRARY OF UPSALA UNIVERSITY.

# Rahel Varnhagen

## A Portrait

## By Ellen Key

Translated from the Swedish by

Arthur G. Chater

With an Introduction by Havelock Ellis

G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press
1913

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To

GEORG BRANDES

Artist and Champion

"Still und bewegt."
(Hölderlin: *Hyperion.*)

Du schweigst und duldest, und sie verstehn dich nicht,
Du heilig Leben! welkest hinweg und schweigst,
Denn ach! vergebens bei Barbaren
Suchst du die Deinen im Sonnenlichte,

Die zärtlichgrossen Seelen, die nimmer sind!
Doch eilt die Zeit. Noch siehet mein sterblich Lied
Den Tag, der, Diotima! nächst den
Göttern mit Helden dich nennt und dir gleicht.
(Hölderlin: *Diotima.*)

# PREFACE

THE following pages are not a study in literary history; no search has been made for new authorities, and no stress is laid on *literal* accuracy in the case of the sources that have been used. Such a work was within neither the aim nor the compass of this book.

My aim has been to give a portrait of the greatest woman the Jewish race has produced; to my mind also the greatest woman Germany can call her daughter.

In spite of the number of works on Rahel the task is not superfluous. Among even cultured Germans, men and women, to whom I have spoken of Rahel, five out of ten knew nothing of her, four had heard something about her, and one had real knowledge of her!

My own impression is not a new one. I was a child when my attention was first caught by a few words about her; when quite young, I read

two essays on her in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, by Blaze-Bury and by Karl Hillebrand. Later on, I lived in *Rahel, ein Buch des Andenkens*, and as long ago as 1885 I wrote in the *Revue* my first essay on her, which I called "Rahel, a Personality." Some parts of that little essay are included in this book, and there is not one of the views of Rahel which I then held that is not reproduced here, though in a more developed form.

I have concentrated my delineation exclusively around Rahel's own person. Those who desire a more detailed picture of Rahel's age and contemporaries may be referred to O. Berdrow's great, conscientious, and sympathetic work, *Rahel und ihre Zeit*. Furthermore, I have based my portrait of Rahel as far as possible on her own words. These are here quoted either directly or indirectly, or sometimes merely reproduced in their leading ideas. Only by such treatment was the concentration possible which was imposed by the compass of the present work. In the same way, the letters are not always quoted in chronological order: an earlier one may appear later, or *vice versa*, or a portion of a letter may occur in one place and another portion in a different one; that is, where the *chronological* connection was unimport-

ant but the *psychological* connection had to be made clear. I think also that in certain cases Rahel's train of thought is made clearer by this free method of reproduction, and that here and there a slightly altered punctuation has made the direct quotations easier to understand. These liberties, forbidden to the learned historian of literature, are as permissible in tracing a portrait as the liberties a painter takes with a view to bringing out the essential and omitting the accidental in the model of whom he seeks to produce a characteristic picture.

Whether I have succeeded in producing such a picture, opinions will of course be divided. My hope of having to some extent understood what is characteristic in Rahel's personality rests exclusively on the love she has inspired in me. For a profound love is a guide, when we seek to penetrate a person's being or work; whether this person is still moving with us along what we call the path of life or whether she influences us as one of those dead who live eternally. Each time I have returned to Rahel, my love has increased. More and more clearly have I perceived the truth of Brandes's judgment: that Rahel "is the first great and modern woman in German culture";

of Hillebrand's: that Rahel as a woman and Goethe as a man are in the same degree typical of their age. But side by side with this perception of Rahel's objective importance, her subjective value has become to me greater and greater, and there is in the literature of the world no woman's book—except the poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning—that I should be more sorry to do without than Rahel's letters.

With this confession of my "lack of objectivity" —and therewith of my conviction that this defect is the real merit of my little work—I now let it go out into the world in the hope that Rahel will once more prove her power as a "guide of the soul" and "consoler of the heart."

ELLEN KEY.

# INTRODUCTION

It is more than seventy years since Carlyle, shortly after her death, brought Rahel Varnhagen before the English-speaking world. Yet, even to-day, she is not a familiar personality to us. Many people who count themselves well informed would be puzzled to say who she was and what she stands for. Even among those who are seeking to work out her ideals into real life, one suspects, not a few feel no responding thrill of blood when they hear the name Rahel.

Carlyle's estimate, indeed, after his wont, was a little grudging. Rahel Varnhagen was a personality, not a writer. As she herself well realised, she was constitutionally incapable of attaining artistic expression with a pen. Her concentrated telegraphic method of letter-writing, filled out with notes of exclamation and notes of interrogation, the "dashes and splashes," the "whirls and tortuosities," sorely tried Carlyle's patience. Yet

he recognised that there were grains of gold hidden in these packed inarticulate thoughts and emotions. He placed Rahel Varnhagen even above Madame de Staël. She has ideas, he remarks, unequalled in De Staël, and a sincerity, a pure tenderness, a genuineness, which that celebrated woman, if she ever possessed, had early lost.

Carlyle, naturally and almost inevitably, approached Rahel Varnhagen mainly from the literary side. Some forty years later, her personality had begun to become clearer, and then, once more, another English writer, this time a woman, approached the subject more rightly as a matter for biography. Mrs. Vaughan Jennings's *Rahel: Her Life and Letters*, published in 1876, is a good book, written with much sympathy, skill, and care; it may be read with interest to-day, although it is not a complete account of Rahel's life. It was not until 1900 that Otto Berdrow published his *Rahel Varnhagen, ein Lebens- und Zeitbild*, which may fairly be regarded as the final biography. Berdrow is completely equipped with all the facts bearing on Rahel, many of them the result of his own research, but his biography, for all its fulness, is no heavy and pedantic work of

mere scholarship. He presents a living picture of his heroine, and so far as possible seeks to make her speak to us in her own words. This work, which has appeared in a new and revised edition, is still unknown to English readers, who have, for the most part, to gain their knowledge of Rahel from an occasional essay, such as the quite competent chapter which Miss Mary Hargrave has included in her recent book, *Some German Women and their Salons.* Rahel Varnhagen has not proved an attractive figure to the literary adventurers in search of a subject.

It is easy to understand why this should be. Rahel was not a brilliant writer; no great practical achievement can be credited to her; there was nothing conspicuously romantic about her life. Her nature never attained full expression. Partly as the result of her youthful struggles, partly, it may be, by natural temperament, her energy was permanently held back from effective action. She was never able to strike out boldly and freely into life. But behind the veil that obscured her the soul of this little Jewess was an ever-burning flame, and the light and the warmth were divined by those who were permitted to come in close

contact with her, "a real woman," as Goethe said of her, "with the strongest feelings I have ever seen and the completest mastery of them." Her nature might never become vigorously articulate in action or even in speech, but in the intensity of its emotional impulse and the clarity of its intellectual vision, it moved freely and audaciously, without regard for the fashions of the world, toward a goal that lay ahead.

It thus comes about that, however Rahel Varnhagen may have been neglected, she really has a hidden significance which only awaits the unveiling hands of those who possess the genius and the intimate sympathy to reveal it. That is why this book of Ellen Key's is of peculiar value and interest. A woman who is herself one of the chief representatives of some of the most vital movements of the day here brings before us, in clear and vivid outline, the woman who, nearly a century earlier, was the inspired pioneer of those movements. For Ellen Key, there is no woman's book in the literature of the world, except Mrs. Browning's poems, that it would be more difficult to dispense with than Rahel Varnhagen's Letters. It may be that not a few of

the readers of this stimulating book of Ellen Key's, led by it to the study of Rahel, may come to feel that such a declaration is scarcely extravagant.

West Drayton,
December, 1912.

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RAHEL VARNHAGEN IN 1817 . *Frontispiece*
From an engraving in the Library of Upsala University.

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RAHEL VARNHAGEN IN 1796 . . . 2
From the bas-relief by Friedrich Tieck. Photograph by Bruckmann.

# Rahel Varnhagen

## CHAPTER I

### ORIGIN

Now and then we meet in life or in letters with a person—sometimes a man, but more often a a woman—who occupies no exceptional position, either through creative genius, or artistic execution, or even through learning, energy, or beauty, and yet this being exercises so decisive a power over our existence that our life comes under an indestructible influence, but at the same time one from which our own liberation proceeds.

For the secret of the power of these rare beings is that they themselves are personalities through and through, and intensify the personality in every one else. Such a being may belong to a bygone age and yet fill us with a wonderful sense

of being her contemporary. Since nothing in her was a matter of custom or convention, we feel not only that she thought but, what is even rarer, that she loved and suffered as we people of the present day, but more deeply. Everything in her is so primordial, so naturally strong, that one imagines one's self to be witnessing the play of the early forces of the race, and at the same time to be confronted by a revelation of the ethical depth, æsthetic sensitiveness, and psychological complexity to which the development of humanity may lead as its final result. As we watch the thoughts and feelings of such a glorious being rushing forth in a Dionysiac train, but intoxicated only with vital force, we feel ourselves more and more liberated from semblance and fortuity. We learn to believe that *what is peculiar to each is indispensable to all;* unhesitatingly, indeed without a thought, we begin to be ourselves and, under the influence of this great personality's passion for truth, we do not understand how we have been able to wear our protective disguise or how we can resume the mask beneath which we have concealed our real features. We then divine what significance this being—who has produced such emotion in us simply through our having caught

RAHEL VARNHAGEN IN 1796.

FROM THE BAS-RELIEF BY FRIEDRICH TIECK.
PHOTOGRAPH BY BRUCKMANN.

fragments of her nature in some journal or letters—must have possessed for her contemporaries. We see that the mere fact of her *having lived* was an immense contribution to civilisation, a never-ceasing evolutionary force.

Such a personality, the concrete realisation of what the foremost spirits among her contemporaries aimed at in their ideas—and at the same time the forerunner of our age, since she prophetically taught her contemporaries to hope for the truths we now live on—was Rahel.

But if the first impression of Rahel is this overflowing wealth of life and primitive force, the next is that in this life also tragedy was the central point of the Dionysia.

The root of her being—like the *Orchis maculata*—shows a light and a dark hand, tightly clasped in each other.

Rahel herself for a long time regarded her Jewish descent as the dark side of her destiny. And she was right in the sense that her descent from a people that had suffered and been humiliated for thousands of years determined her own character and through it her experiences.

Outwardly, on the other hand, Rahel's childhood and youth coincide with the period of the

Jewish revival, especially in Berlin; a period during which the Jews emerged from their segregated and despised position with a rapidity that is more often rendered possible by the influence of the spirit of the age than by legislation.

Frederick the Great did not do much to alter the *legal* position of the Jews. But the freedom from prejudice, which was diffused around him in ever wider circles, was also to the advantage of the Jews. And to this indirect influence was added a direct one, through Moses Mendelssohn, the liberator of the Jews from their own prejudices, their awakener to a perception of their own powers. Hitherto the Jews, in Mendelssohn's words, had only shown their strength "in prayer and suffering, but not in action." He conjured up in them the desire of freedom and the instinct of development. Himself a deist in the spirit of the age of enlightenment, he nevertheless remained in the Jewish congregation in order to be able to combat from within such prejudices as gave rise, for example, to a Jewish boy—a few years before Mendelssohn's first book was published—being expelled from the Mosaic congregation for having carried, on behalf of another

person, a German book from one street to another! Mendelssohn ventured to write in German and to translate the Old Testament; he caused a school to be opened, in which the Jewish youth learned the German language—until that time the Jews spoke a jargon that was neither German nor Hebrew—and participated in the wealth of German culture. Thus was spun the first and strongest thread of the bond that thenceforward year by year united the Jews more and more firmly to the German people.

The self-esteem with which the Prussian nation as a whole was filled under Frederick II., caused that of the Jews also to increase. These same Jews, who were still subject to exceptional laws, one of which—renewed as late as 1802—placed them in one respect in the same category as thieves and murderers; these same Jews, of whom a Moses Mendelssohn still knew what it was to have stones thrown at himself and his children during their walks outside the Jewish quarter, these same Jews now became not only great leaders of financial enterprise and generous philanthropists, but leaders of society as well. During the last quarter of the eighteenth century it was not only the masculine half of the fashionable

world of Berlin that mixed with the foremost Jewish families, but that fashionable world itself that eagerly sought admission to the homes of those families.

No doubt princes, noblemen, and diplomats had often come in contact with the Jewish bankers—in connection with loans. But when, after this, bankers threw open their drawing-rooms to the young members of the aristocracy, they found there so much attraction that it soon became a valued favour, and then good tone to mix in these Jewish circles.

The young men, more or less penetrated by the ideas of the time, found in Jewish houses a more intelligent, unprejudiced, and easy social tone than was permitted by the women of their own families. The young, handsome, cultured, and vivacious women who were the leaders of the Jewish salons invited, for instance, actors and actresses, who as a rule were still excluded from "good society," to their houses. Good music was performed, fine works of art decorated the rooms; scholars, poets, and artists were not only present, but conversed with more freedom than elsewhere, encouraged by their hostesses, who possessed a frankness, a mental alertness, a warmth, that were usually absent

in the German ladies of the time. And soon the young men brought with them a sister or a friend, who was anxious to share the social privileges about which the male members of her family were enthusiastic. In this way the Jewish salons also acquired an indirect influence on the development of social life in wider circles. Thus for the first time the Jewish woman fulfilled a civilising mission in modern society.

In the European history of the Jews themselves more than one woman had distinguished herself before this.[1] But the Jewish women's great and rapid receptivity for another civilisation, with different objects from those of the purely Jewish culture, appears first in the time of the Jewish salons of Berlin. It proved that the new "seed fell on an altogether new, virgin soil."[2] And when this is the case—Russia and America afford evidence of it in abundance—we always see a setting-aside of time-honoured forms, a break

[1] For example, Maria Nuñez, who in conjunction with Jacob Tirado founded the first Spanish-Jewish congregation at Amsterdam; Doña Gracia Mendoza, who gave shelter and aid to all the homeless among her people, in addition to promoting Jewish culture; Berusia as a thinker, Rebecca Tiktiner as a writer, and Sarah Copia Sullam as a poet, who were all independent influences.

[2] Henriette Herz.

with tradition, even in the useful meaning of the word, while their disadvantages are counterbalanced by great advantages.

Among the Jewish youth there appeared both the disadvantages and the advantages we are speaking of: for example, great zeal for culture, mental mobility, and sometimes a profound originality.

The Jewish women in particular, who had more time and leisure than the men, showed in their intellectual interests a passion and a capacity for cultivation which did not always imply a corresponding individuality. Such an individuality was present in certain of these Jewesses; others again appeared original only through qualities which belonged to their race. They were all subject in a peculiar way to the Oriental patriarchal despotism that still obtains to-day in many a Jewish home, and the more frequently as one approaches the eastern boundary of Europe. On the other hand they received impressions from the liberal ideas of the time and from its most refined culture. Young Jewish girls had access, through their married friends, to books, studies, acquaintances, which perhaps their own homes did not offer them. They read Voltaire, Shakespeare,

and Tasso in the original; they revelled in contemporary German literature, became enthusiastic admirers of Goethe. All the intellectual hunger that had been growing for generations among their people could now at last be satisfied. They lived in a time that took its colour and form from great minds and great events, and their essential development was now determined by their own time, and no longer by the traditions of a thousand years. The strongest and most elastic among them—like Dorothea Mendelssohn—transform the destiny imposed on them by paternal authority, and the social and intellectual emancipation that has imperceptibly fallen to their lot as a consequence of the age they live in, is consciously completed by themselves in their deepest personal relations.

Henriette Herz—in a certain sense Rahel's rival in the social life of Berlin—declares that the soul of the Jewish woman, thus awakened, reached its highest development in and through Rahel.

Rahel possessed the characteristics that distinguish great minds among her people: a deep longing for directness of life in sunshine and splendour, in fervour and passion, and an equally

deep longing for the calm of the desert, there to meditate on life, its paths and its goal. The intellectual energy that oppression had checked in its outward tendency had in Rahel—as in the foremost of her people—turned inwards. Rahel, through her independence of thought and her passion for liberty, was far in advance of the women of her time, Jewish as well as German. But viewed in connection with the whole development Rahel is typical of the great movement which is still taking place—that movement which seeks to evolve the completely human personality from the feminine creature of sex.

In the innumerable records of admiration that her contemporaries have left about Rahel, her race is scarcely mentioned—a thing that in these days of anti-Semiticism strikes one as almost inconceivable. But it seems as though the humanism of that time was so profound that the question of race, among cultivated people, had lost its meaning. Or did perhaps Rahel's own great personality place her beyond and above all customary points of view where her people were concerned? Or were the bright sides of that people

more conspicuous and the dark sides less so than in our time?

Whether it was that one of these reasons or all together caused her contemporaries to see in her a personality equally detached and unique—it is certain that this way of regarding herself did not free her from the pain of belonging to a nation so long exiled and wronged, the less so as she—in common with other delicately organised Jews—was doubly pained by all the consequences this past history had left behind in the soul of the people. Every prejudice, every instance of ill-breeding, every baseness that she encountered in those around her afflicted her more deeply than similar things met with elsewhere.

"I imagine that just as I was being thrust into this world a supernatural being plunged a dagger into my heart, with these words: 'Now, have feeling, see the world as only a few see it, be great and noble; nor can I deprive you of restless, incessant thought. But with one reservation: be a Jewess!' And now my whole life is one long bleeding. By keeping calm I can prolong it; every movement to staunch the bleeding is to die anew, and immobility is only possible to me in death itself. . . ."

"How loathsomely degrading, offensive, insane, and low are my surroundings, which I cannot avoid. One single defilement, a mere contact, sullies me and dis-

turbs my nobility. And this struggle goes on for ever! All the beauty that I meet with in life passes me by as a stranger, and I am compelled to live unknown among the unworthy!"

It is in connection with this extreme sensitiveness that we must interpret Rahel's later words: that whole forests of vegetation within her had been laid waste by "parents, brothers, and sisters, men and women friends, and miserable lovers."

That Rahel should have ascribed to her descent all the sufferings that tormented her, is justified in a deeper sense than perhaps she herself intended. Outwardly there was scarcely more than one sorrow in her life that was caused—and that only in part—by her being a Jewess, namely, the breaking off of her first engagement.

But the decisive point is that Rahel's blood is the blood of a Jewish woman, and that this blood is not only made strong by the best qualities of the race, but at the same time heavy by its most grievous misfortunes.

Jakob Wassermann, in whom the consciousness of his race is deeper than in any other Jewish writer of our time, has maintained in an essay on Rahel[1] that "the melancholy intensity and painful

[1] *Der Tag*, March 24, 1904.

shyness," that Rahel herself suffered from, belong to her as the prototype of the modern Jewish woman of culture; that love of humanity was intensified in her by a mysterious feeling of indebtedness; that her enthusiasm becomes ecstasy, that her measure is excess; that her devotion has a fervour that completely embraces, nay, is fused with its object.

Wassermann in this passage accentuates rather the weaknesses of the Jewess's disposition. I have often had the opportunity of admiring its great qualities.

Every one knows—and many acknowledge—the intellectual gifts, creative force, thirst for knowledge, and persevering, clear-sighted energy of the Jewish people. But too little is said of the qualities which nevertheless appear most characteristic to those who have seen Jewish women and men at close quarters: their strength in love, their sense of fraternity, their helpfulness and self-sacrifice. It was not an accident that Jesus came of the Jewish people. The attempts now made to prove that he was an Aryan are a waste of labour for those who—as in my case—have more readily found his qualities in those of Jewish than in those of Germanic descent.

Rahel possessed all the merits of her race, but in a special degree those just mentioned. The deep, warm Oriental disposition, the passionate, rich blood, no doubt found their greatest expression in her erotic experiences. But the Oriental force of love appears in all her feelings: in family affection, in friendship, in her worship of her great masters, in her motherliness. She speaks on one occasion of the griefs of parents and says that she can well understand them, for "many realms of grief have I explored." That warm, red blood, that strong, quick pulse, which made her live in love and suffer through love all her life, are racial characteristics, raised in her to their highest power. Her race and her individuality combined made her surround the object of her love, affection, friendship with great devotion—even when she is aware that her feeling is exclusively nourished from sources of her own. She was grateful so long as *she* could continue to love, she, who had found one of the bitterest of love's secrets to be that people not only do not understand one another, but "do not love one another at the same time." Rahel certainly possessed self-esteem, a feeling to which she gives expression as frank as it is justified. But in her,

as in others who, from one cause or another—an unfortunate exterior, for instance, or a desposed origin—have been injured times without number, this self-esteem was, so to speak, theoretical; it did not gush forth spontaneously, it sufficed neither for due self-assertion in everyday life nor for the uncompromising attitude necessary in exceptional cases.

"Two unutterable faults I have," says Rahel in reference to the bas-relief of her by F. Tieck. This, and another portrait, she found very like, but both were distasteful to her, since she saw in them these two faults clearly expressed:

"Too much gratitude, and too great a regard for the human countenance. . . . I should sooner be able to grasp my own heart and wound it than injure a human face or look at one that had been injured. And I am too grateful, seeing that fortune has been against me and my first thought is always of repaying evil with good.

"All this results from bountiful, careless nature's having given me one of the most delicate, highly organised hearts in the world, which, however, is not seen, since I have no personal amiability. . . ." "I have many gifts but no courage, not that courage which might set my gifts in motion, not that courage which might teach me to enjoy life, even at another's expense. I rank the personality of others higher than

my own; I prefer peace to enjoyment and have therefore never known the latter."

But one need not be a Jewess to make the experience that consideration and thoughtfulness, forbearance and kindness do not result in others behaving to us as we to them, if these qualities are combined with disinterestedness in what concerns one's self. The unassuming person is passed by, while the exacting and inconsiderate teach others to show circumspection and tact—that is an experience which all races will confirm. When Rahel's family once gave her a Christmas present that was both useless and ugly, and they excused themselves by saying that "it was so difficult to find anything for her," who was thankful for the smallest kindness and provided herself with as little as possible, Rahel broke out into lamentations over her own lack of charm, to which she also ascribed her capacity to assert herself gracefully.

One of Rahel's friends, W. von Burgsdorf, says with profound understanding of her nature, that he at once learned not to take her literally; that behind her words, which often seemed stronger than their occasion, he soon found that she must have been brought up in a long grief.

"For, it is true, a trace of the destiny you

have gone through is visible in you; one notices in you the early acquired silence and concealment. . . . Every scar that fate has left on the character disturbs your consciousness. . . ." But he added with perfect truth: "The same force which strives to go to the bottom of pain, in you returns with equal grace to joy. You are so full of easy, glorious life."

But this long grief was neither exclusively nor even primarily due to her Jewish birth. That she was so much more vulnerable, shy, easily discouraged, unpretending than other Jewesses of her circle, depended on the circumstances which determined her childhood and youth.

Rahel herself indicates the suffering of her childhood and youth when she speaks of the strong heart nature had given her, but which her "hard, strict, violent, capricious, gifted, almost insane father overlooked and broke—yes, *broke*. Destroyed all my capacity for action, without, however, being able to enfeeble my character." And thus she also lost the "courage to be happy" which nature had given her.

Of this father, the banker Levin-Markus—his children afterwards adopted the name of Robert—

there is a portrait in Berlin which shows intelligence, love of pleasure, an outward bent of mind, and harshness. The cane he holds in his hand was the sceptre he wielded over his family. For at that time the authority of the head of the family was a dogma that had not yet been attacked either in Christian or Jewish homes. But here it must be added that the father was personally a despot, who demanded unconditional subservience from those about him, and neither tolerated an independent will nor a contradictory opinion.

And under the rule of this father Rahel grew up, the leading characteristic of whose nature was a most pronounced independence!

Among her father's numerous decrees was one that no birthdays were to be kept in the family. Thus all Rahel knew about hers was that she was born on Whitsunday, 1771, and that it fell in May; her biographers have ascertained that in that year it was May 19th. She was the eldest child and was so extremely delicate and weak that at first she lay wrapped in cotton-wool in a box. To strengthen her body by suitable remedies was an idea that no more occurred to her parents than to others of the time. One illness after another attacked her susceptible frame during childhood,

and this susceptibility persisted throughout life as a part of her sufferings. But also of her joys. For the delicate organisation, which caused her to sicken from a breath of air and recover in a sunbeam, implied at the same time that extreme sensitiveness to all mental impressions whereby her enjoyment was multiplied. This susceptibility, this *Reizbarkeit*, in Lamprecht's extended meaning of the word, involved none of that want of consideration, that lack of self-control, which people of the present day designate and excuse by the elastic expression "nerves." Rahel had perhaps to thank the strictness of her home for her rare self-control, in part directly, and in part through its evoking her powers of resistance. To live in spite of all and to live a life rich in meaning, not to allow her suffering to be remarked by those about her, it was to this that Rahel directed from her earliest years the strength of will she had inherited from her race in general and from her father in particular.

For this energy of self-preservation, which was increased by her ill-health, she had full use in the still harder fight for her personal independence against this father, whose outbursts of anger, unreasonable commands, scornful address, and

brutal assaults made the whole family tremble. Rahel alone ventured now and then to oppose him. Her incorruptible love of truth, her indomitable independence were regarded by her father as defiance and obstinacy, faults which he tried to break, with the same enjoyment as a cannibal breaking human bones. One shudders at the thought of the ill-treatment the girl, equally sensitive in mind and body, had to undergo, an ill-treatment which she summed up in the words:

"A more tortured youth cannot be experienced; no one can be more ill or nearer to madness."

Every child that, from one cause or another, has grown up in harsh surroundings, bears through life the consequences of the first years of its life. So also was it with Rahel. During these years she suffered so much that, according to her own words, she ought to have exhausted all her possibilities in this direction! She sees that the lack of charm by which she means candour, self-confidence, ease of manner—of which she is so bitterly aware, has its origin in this childhood of ill-treatment and oppression, for life is kind to those whose "earliest conditions of life have been blessed." And it is true that such people approach life with confidence, while those who have

been unhappy in childhood stand awkwardly and timidly when happiness stretches out its hand, as though they lacked courage to conquer a place for themselves or strength to keep that which they have chanced to win. Rahel's early youth seems to have been made still more difficult through the father being proud of the gifts his daughter had inherited from himself, of the remarks by which she soon attracted attention in his select social circle. His own brilliant intelligence and keen wit brought him and his house into request, and he wished to gain in his daughter a reinforcement of his own influence. Rahel herself says that up to her fourteenth year she was witty and thus fell under the suspicion of her Jewish circle—a remark which implies that she was witty at the expense of others. With adolescence we may suppose that she began consciously to criticise her father's way of using his wit, and thus commenced the tacit or open struggle not only between their wills, but between their souls. He wished to stamp his daughter in his own image, that of the external and brilliant man of society. But this attempted moulding may have been the very thing that awakened Rahel's self-consciousness both to the temptations she ought to avoid and the ideal she wished to

pursue. The disgust her father and his whole nature inspired in her burned away all possibility of frivolity, of superficiality, and turned her mind inward, in the certainty that only by lonely paths could she find and preserve her essential ego.

Goethe says somewhere that "persistence and directness of aim" are properties that are found even in the most obscure Jew. When these properties are united to a rich material for personality, they produce the wholeness, unity, coalescence which Rahel recognises in herself—and others in her—as that which separates her from other people in the most distinctive way. "All my life I have only considered myself as Rahel and nothing else," she said once, expressing surprise at the attention that was shown her during an illness. But she *became* Rahel in that "furnace of affliction" from which her personality proceeded as though cast in bronze and her will like hardened steel.

Rahel calls it a gift of God that she always knows what she wants, although in spite of her strength of will she has been "abused and shouted down and thwarted"—a thing which nevertheless concerns only the periphery of her existence.

Her strength of will not only sustained her in

spite of ill-health but multiplied her powers when they were required for others, as nurse, for instance. But she derived yet another characteristic, important in daily life, from her race: the practicalness, presence of mind and organisation which gave her power over the multitude of little, everyday tasks, constantly tending to chaos. This rapid and practical sense of actuality, which is the secret of the Jewish people's success, was enhanced, through Rahel's rich nature, in her to a beneficent development of an eternally fresh life, "composed of nothing but real being," as Varnhagen expresses it. Through order, tidiness, neatness, and supervision, Rahel possessed that grasp of daily life without which it never acquires style or beauty.

Through these qualities she became not only good, but really helpful. And this Oriental combination of a sense of reality and mysticism is found wherever the mysticism is deep. Nay, is it not, so to speak, the actual characteristic of the founder of religion and is it not by means of this very characteristic that the Orient has given the world all its great religions?

The Germanic race and culture, in the midst of which Rahel grew up, undoubtedly contributed to

deepen her nature, to give it greater diversity. But the invincibility of its individuality, the indestructibility of its fire, the lightning rapidity of its clearsightedness, the profundity of its meditation, the keenness of its analysis, the wildness of its despair, the jubilation of its gratitude,—all these are as Eastern as the Psalms and Ecclesiastes.

After her father's death in 1789, Rahel's life become easier. Freed from daily suffering, her health, through a "successful revolution," also improved. She felt an inclination for the pleasures of youth, and even learned to dance—but soon had enough of dancing as a social amusement. In the attic under the paternal roof she had plenty of time and leisure for her inner development. But within the family circle there remained, amongst other things, the authority inherited by the brothers from the father over the female members of the family, which to Rahel was especially onerous in questions of money, where, moreover, her mother's parsimony in daily life was more disagreeable than her brother's acquisitiveness.

Her mother seems to have been an insignificant woman, broken down and made melancholy by her husband's tyranny, and Rahel's nature met

with no appreciation from her. Of the others, her sister, Rose, may have been on cordial terms with Rahel, though without any very profound community of souls. Such a community, however, united her to her younger brother Ludwig—her "*Herzensbruder*"—who, himself an author, introduces her into the society of young poets in Berlin after 1800. The elder brothers again, Moritz and Marcus, are absorbed in financial interests, and although in this particular they behave well to their sisters, they have inwardly little in common.

And Rahel seems to be prepared not to meet with appreciation in the family circle. What she asks is that she may be left in peace. But as usual her mother, brothers, and sisters, even after Rahel had become the celebrated Rahel, saw in her only the daughter and the sister, on whose strong Jewish family affection they could always rely, when they needed it in sickness or trouble, sorrow or anxiety. Between whiles they misinterpret, admonish, and disapprove with the right of indelicacy which members of a family regard even to-day as their most indisputable privilege in dealing with one another.

Rahel breaks out to a friend:

"I am made ill by embarrassment, by constraint, as long as I live. I live against my will. . . . My everlasting dissimulation, my circumspection, my compliance are wearing me out. I cannot endure it any longer, and nothing and nobody can help me." "*I have been spared no blow, no stab, no thrust, or sting*," she says in the connection.

It may be presumed that Rahel, like most strong natures, suffered for a very long time before something, trivial in the eyes of the others, made her break out. She says herself: "Few are more explosive than I: I can keep it in for a long time, but sooner or later it has to come out." Probably she could be hasty, rough, and unreasonable with her own people, as with Varnhagen, in questions where, against them as against him, she was nevertheless right in the main. Like others, she had *les défauts de ses qualités*.

On the whole she shows by her actions how deep her family feeling is.

She writes to her family:

"Do I not tell you everything? Do I ever allow myself any rest before you have had all the intellectual, agreeable, social, and other news I can get? Have I ever said *I?* Do I not always say *we?*—and God knows how incessantly I think it! I am no hardened egoist, but a joyful and sensitive expander of life."

Rahel has a need of worshipping, of looking up to people.

"I cannot speak of him—for I can *only* be just," she says on one occasion. "With my nature I have been sufficiently revenged, if I can no more love." She always believes in a person from the first. "It is one of my estimable stupidities always to take people seriously," she says. "My only talent is being able to see things on a large scale, my only pleasure—and only levity—being able to forget myself," she writes on another occasion. And of these talents those about her also had the benefit.

But it was precisely her quality of "life-expander" that above all displeased her timorous and narrow-minded mother, who had diffused about herself a cool and musty spiritual atmosphere. Rahel's love of her family was what she herself calls "fibre-love," the feeling which nature intertwines with every fibre of our being and which keeps its strength even when one has scarcely a thought in common. When there was need of it she could sacrifice for them time, strength, money, pleasures, and their real interests went "right to the bottom of her heart." But to their pettiness and narrowness she would not yield. The

criterion that her family circle had imposed upon itself was the point of view Rahel hated: "What was fitting and proper." According to this valuation the trivial became great and the significant of small account. When Rahel was herself—daring, animated, sparkling, unprejudiced—the least of her relatives assumed a right to preach to her of duty, consideration, moderation, and prudence!

Meanwhile indignation accumulated within her. And when her "heavily charged store of ideas found an outlet," it is evident that she caused consternation by the passionate force of her opinions; that she was considered overbearing and domineering, or any other of the words that are used about people of strong convictions by those who are incapable of a strong conviction. But all those, on the other hand, who themselves had views, found Rahel delicately sensitive, tactful, forbearing, tolerant of everything but pretentious stupidity, slander, and lying in all its forms—whether more or less conscious, more or less impudent.

When Rahel takes a schoolgirl's delight in driving with an opera singer to a dress rehearsal on the Sabbath, one can understand how the pressure

of Jewish customs came to the aid of that of the family.

On the whole, however, Rahel's relations with her brothers remained good. And when she exclaims that "they neither regarded her nor loved her," these words must not be taken absolutely, but only relatively to Rahel's own capacity for devotion.

With her mother, on the other hand, her relations became finally so strained that she insisted on Rahel's leaving the paternal house in Jägerstrasse, which in spite of all had become dear to her, where the mother then lapsed into "her dismal, threadbare, uncomfortable solitude," in "pitiful miserliness." But Rahel, thus exiled, visited her mother daily, although the latter received her with the greatest indifference, until in 1809 her mother lay on her death-bed and for four months Rahel nursed her day and night. The approach of death dispersed the many misunderstandings which had concealed the daughter's real nature from the mother. The grateful love her mother now at last showed Rahel, as well as the courage with which she bore her sufferings, made Rahel tend her with a "passionate pain." But Rahel no more altered her relation to her than to her father:

they had each had their share in the sufferings of childhood and youth under which her heart had groaned, and Rahel did not forget. But while she could never forgive her father, she forgave her mother, since she had been the father's victim as much as Rahel herself.

The sufferings that had only darkened her mother's narrow nature, kindled in Rahel's a great light: that of sympathy; and gave her a great strength: that of solitude. The power of introspection and absorption that solitude, and only that, can give, had a determining effect on Rahel's nature. However much she may afterwards become a woman of society, she yet lives, until Varnhagen appears, in a perpetual inner solitude as a consequence of the circumstances of which she says that through them her life has been murderously taken from her.

In a letter to Varnhagen, Rahel says:

"This week I have thought out what a paradox is: a truth which has not yet been able to find room to reveal itself, which violently thrusts itself into the world, and is twisted out of joint in the process. . . . So am I, unfortunately, and this will be the death of me. Never can my soul gently glide into fair undulating motions. . . . How truly, beloved friend, and how

sadly do you compare me with a tree that has been pulled up out of the earth and then had its top buried therein. Nature has designed me too strong."

And just as the peculiar force of Rahel's thought can only be understood as the result of solitude, so must her peculiar tone of feeling be understood as derived from suffering.

Rahel belonged in a spiritual sense to that class of persons who are called in a physical sense "bleeders." A scratch, which in another person would easily heal, may in them occasion prolonged bleeding, and the film over a wound is so thin that it breaks at the slightest shock and causes a fresh flow of blood.

No one who does not perceive this can ever understand Rahel, when she uses the strongest words about sufferings long past or when she is painfully distressed at what seems to others a trifle.

For with this little wound all her other wounds are opened, and in this complaint are echoed all the lamentations of her people.

Whether or no Rahel perceived what she had to thank her race for, it is certain that the bitterness with which in youth she speaks of her birth, disappears with time. Perhaps this was simply due

to the growth of that *amor fati*, which is to the human being what flowering is to the aloe, the great feat of strength before death?

"I no longer envy anybody anything but such things as no one has"—these words of Rahel's are significant of her state of soul in the last years of her life.

Rahel had always been willing to acknowledge her descent. Indeed, in Paris she laid stress on the fact that she was *a Jewess from Berlin*, and rejoiced that she did honour to her native city. So also did she rejoice when, during the war, she could manifest the patriotic self-sacrificing of the Jews in her own person and through her co-religionists. That on her marriage she went over to Christianity was neither a defection from Judaism, which she had never embraced as a believer, nor an act of faith as regards the Christian religion, but only the drawing of a sign of equation between herself and the man whose position in life she was to share. When the patriotic fever that succeeded the Napoleonic wars evoked manifestations of anti-Semiticism, she was deeply ontraged and expressed to her Christian friends her detestation of this brutality. The more she learned, freed from dependence on her

own relatives, to look upon Judaism objectively, the more was she reconciled to the fate that made her a member of that nation. And on her deathbed, when she finally saw her whole life from the point of view of eternity, she praised in affecting words the destiny which had made her, the fugitive from Egypt and the land of Canaan, so beloved and cared for by her dear ones.

"In solemn transport I think of this origin of mine, and of the whole interconnection of destinies through which the oldest memories of the human race are associated with the present state of things, and thus the forms most widely separate in time and space are connected with each other. That which for so long a period of my life appeared to me the greatest ignominy, the bitterest suffering and misfortune, namely, being born a Jewess, I would not now renounce at any price."

## CHAPTER II

### PERSONALITY

In Rahel's, as in every other pronounced personality, one can point to certain component parts by which the race and the family have contributed to its composition; one can even divine the process of moulding. But the means by which just this personality results from these component parts and from the treatment which in others would have produced quite different forms—that remains the eternal riddle. The individual features of the personality, its peculiar style, its unique charm, can no more be described or grasped in dealing with the living work of art—a consummate personality—than in dealing with the statue of bronze. Not only the work of art, as Kellgren has said, has "sprung from the womb of a glowing imagination": the individuality too springs from such a womb, that of Nature herself. Her imagination works as mysteriously as that of genius, and

her style it is equally impossible to catch in the scant, grey meshes of words.

Several of Rahel's most eminent contemporaries have attempted to describe her personality. The most successful among them were probably those who approached most nearly to her own self-analysis. For if it can be said of any one that she really knew herself, then that person is Rahel. In the whole world of women there is no one who can be better compared with Rahel in courage and inclination for exploring her own soul, in zeal of self-examination, and candour of self-revelation, than Marie Bashkirtseff. For there is need to remind certain modern authors of feminine confessions that shamelessness is not synonymous with candour, nor communicativeness with knowledge of self.

Rahel's letters, published after her death, were to her contemporaries a revelation of a new type of woman in the same degree as Marie Bashkirtseff's *Journal* was to our time. However different their natures may be at times, they are alike in this, that their life of the soul and will is so individual, so marked, and that it revealed itself so directly and so consciously, that it became at once a spiritual power with which one was brought into

relation, sympathetically or antipathetically, but indifference to which was impossible.

For the rest, the manner of the two self-portraits is as different as the times in which they appeared. The young Russian paints herself *en plein air*, in a pitiless, all-revealing morning light; Rahel's picture appears in a *chiaroscuro*, in which the longer one looks the more one discovers.

In attempting to reproduce my impression of Rahel's personality I am reminded of her own words: that we see ourselves in concave but others in convex; that when we try to penetrate and judge a person, we encounter ourselves, and this makes true objectivity impossible. "For the resemblance," Rahel concludes, "that exists between persons, extends only to the outer limits of their being."

As one cannot reproduce one's impression of a personality directly, one tries to do so by means of images. Thus, for instance, I may say that to me Rahel has the same deep purple, almost black tint as Eleonora Duse; that the perfume which comes nearest to her nature is that of the yellow narcissus, while the music which expresses her most perfectly is Beethoven's *Appassionata*. But

in these images I have at the most given an idea of my conception of Rahel to those who receive from this tint, this perfume, and this music impressions of the same tone of feeling as my own.

For in relation to the great, mystical reality—the unique personality—the image is as the Egyptian hieroglyphic sign for life in relation to living life itself.

There is only one objective way of drawing a marked individuality: to compare the person's own utterances and actions with the impression his personality produces on contemporaries. For a person's own words often deceive one, his actions not unfrequently, other's opinions more often than all. But if all three agree, one can be certain that in the particular case, the unity and cohesion of the personality at least are beyond doubt.

And it is precisely this agreement between the impression Rahel produces on others and the insight she gives us into her own nature, which justifies the conclusion that she *was* what she says she was, and that one can best form her image from her own confessions.

What Rahel always and before all else lays stress upon is that "God and Nature" meant well with

her but that destiny and fortune have been against her; that nature was proud, nay, overbearing, when she came into the world; that she ought to have been "high-born," and that the exuberant powers of happiness she possessed within her only required a little exemption from direct suffering to show their strength. She knows that she is fashioned to enjoy life, not merely to undergo it, and it is this source of light in Rahel's nature —its healthy, beautiful sensuousness, its desire of sunshine, its "joy over what lies nearest," its delight in the happiness of all who are happy —which gives Rahel her direct warmth. And it is only with this vital energy as the foundation of one's being that a really deep suffering is thinkable; a vital energy that rebels against its torments, that is by turns vanquished and victorious but never acknowledges pain as the meaning of life. Rahel calls herself a "fresher, gayer, more brunette Hamlet," and Veit, the friend of her youth, says that with "Philine's gay disposition she combined Aurelia's genius and heart, her goodness and tendency to melancholy." . . . All who have profoundly understood Rahel, above all Varnhagen, lay stress on what I would call the *chiaroscuro* in her nature as the secret of its charm.

In a letter from Jean Paul to Rahel, which begins with the words: "Winged one!—in every sense"—he says: "You treat life poetically and consequently life treats you in the same way. You bring the lofty freedom of poetry into the sphere of reality, and expect to find again the same beauties here as there." . . .

This judgment reaches the core of Rahel's nature It is this *pristine* character of Rahel's that she feels ought to have been her fate. But her fate, from the causes mentioned later, was a different one. She cannot live according to her character, but at least she dies according to it, as she says every one really does. She knows that every human being "has his altogether special fate," since he is "a moment of the whole, which can only exist once"; and she demands of existence at least her own *special* unhappy fate, since it has not given her the happy fate.

Thus she wrote during the cholera at Berlin: "I claim a special, personal fate. I *cannot* die of an epidemic like a straw among other ears of corn in the open field, scorched by marsh-gas. I will die *alone* of *my* malady; this is *I*, my character, my person, my physique, my fate."

And every one has his fate, Rahel thought, since every one has his individuality. Originality, she says, is much more common than frankness; in-

deed, most people might be original if they would only be true! Of herself she can bear witness—without any one having challenged her—that she has devoted herself to a god, Truth, and that each time she has been saved in the misery of life, it has been through this divinity.

There is no subject to which she returns more often in her letters than originality, and where it existed she forgave almost anything. "He who honestly asks and answers himself, is always occupied with realities and is constantly finding things out. . . . In order to be able to think, honesty is above all necessary. . . ." What she hated most of all was pedantry, "for its origin is inward emptiness, therefore it clings to forms. . . ." A person who is not *true*, *honest*, and *innocent* can neither be poet, artist, philosopher, human being, friend, member of a family, man of the world, business man, nor ruler. . . . It is love of truth that is wanting in us; that is the diseased spot of the race, the cause of all our epidemics of the soul. . . . It depends upon ourselves to become human beings (*i. e.*, original). But for this an infinite courage is needed. . . . "It does not matter at all *how* one is, if one cannot be as one *wishes*."

All these utterances denote the nature that gave

vent to itself in the following answer to Varnhagen, where she playfully says that she ought to be recast so as to be more tractable: "Then I should spurt out of the mould!"

"Some people have too little understanding to find the truth within them, others no courage to acknowledge it, and the great majority neither courage nor understanding, but they wander and lie and grope or stagnate through life even to the grave."

Another time she exclaims: "I am beside myself! For so we call it when the heart really speaks."

Honesty is to her the necessary condition for keeping one's youth: "When one is honest in one's thoughts, one is true. And only in truth is health to be found. He who has not this, grows old: wrinkles alone do not make us old."

Nay, Rahel assures us that downright, pure brutality revives her, when she has been wearied by insincerity!

To a young male friend (Bokelmann) Rahel writes these profound words: "What makes the mind and soul of man colder than inactivity? . . . Think always ceaselessly! This is the only duty, the only happiness. . . ." And she goes on to implore him, however often he may have thought out a thing, never to cease from "ploughing through it" afresh; never to allow any dear and honoured

friends, not even herself, to seduce and master him so that he forgets the duty of incessant mental work. He must always have the courage to hurt himself with questioning and doubts; to destroy the most comfortable and beautiful edifice of thought—one that might have stood for life—if honesty demands it; to dare ceaselessly to put such questions to himself as may shake to their foundations all his relations to other people; never to allow himself to be lulled to sleep by any system of morality established once for all, protective and becoming; never to lapse into the routine of custom in any respect and thus bar the gates of his soul; constantly to remain mentally restless, unquiet, and to remember her—Rahel's—everlasting mobility and freedom, her strict, ever-examining love of truth; not to allow himself to be led astray by any one or anything into a belief or imprisoned in a bond which will make him sigh out his life as a duty; not to prize anything *merely* because it is old and bears a good name.

To Rahel herself this kind of honest thinking and honest communication of the result was as much a mental condition of life as breathing a physical one. In the *vital necessity* of such honesty lies its deepest significance as regards Rahel.

Every one thinks more or less for the benefit of some particular belief, idea or feeling, and withholds from himself and others whatever conflicts with this; Rahel, on the other hand, is, as she says herself "innocent" in her thinking.

What Rahel loves in Angelus Silesius—that he turns to God in innocent questioning, demands no answer, makes no asseverations, but is capable at the same time of "regretful renunciation" and of being "a child's soul full of courage"—all this may be said of Rahel herself. This childlike quality of Rahel is accentuated also by her friends. And this is just the condition that gives her courage to speak out fully on everything, careless as to the effect, naïvely profound like a child, to which things established, sanctioned, and acknowledged have not yet disclosed their trenched ambuscades and barbed-wire entanglements, but which moves fearless and unconstrained so long as it is free from preconceptions, thinking for itself and discovering itself. But such a child Rahel remained all her life.

Rahel's influence on her friends of the same age takes especially that form which is shown in the letter to Bokelmann, quoted above. The highly gifted physician, David Veit, Rahel's oldest male friend,

speaks of how ready he was to be guided by Rahel, for she did not *wish* to dominate him, although she unconsciously did so through the power of the highest human nature, through "her dear, princely soul."

G. von Brinckman, who was a Swede by birth but had been educated at a German university and absorbed the most refined culture of the time as a diplomat at the capitals of Europe, is even in Rahel's youth one of her most appreciative friends. He, like Veit, ascribes to Rahel a profound influence on his development. Brinckman said that he received from Rahel's exhortations to "*Geistesmut*" an impression as strong as if he had suddenly been transported to an altogether new mental world. Rahel's mental force, her independence, her certainty that "higher morality is reached through higher liberty," all this transformed his own point of view in many cases. "What I had sought in vain in the wise and the pious: undisguised truth, independence of thought, and intensity of feeling; this came upon me as a holy revelation in the garret of this extraordinary '*Selbstdenkerin*,'" says Brinckman. To look into her "divinely beating heart," to cultivate the exchange, of confidences with her, became to him a necessity, passionate as a love, he says. In the presence of wise men and princes he boasted of being Rahel's disciple, and during his whole life her influence on him remained as "spiritually powerful and highly human" as ever. The correspondence between Brinckman and Tegnér, published by Professor Wrangel, is an important aid to our knowledge of the former.

Throughout her life, in a hundred different

passages, Rahel says that she has always known that she neither *could* nor *should* possess anything but herself; that she therefore confines herself to "the strength of my own heart" and to "what my mind shows me"; that she knew that only by keeping within these bounds assigned to her by nature was she powerful, in all else nothing.

Frequently, too, she speaks of "the great, thorough-going connection between all my faculties, the eternally indestructible connection and ceaseless co-operation between my feeling and my thought." On account of this she is able to say: "I am as much alone of my kind as the greatest manifestation here on earth. The greatest artist, philosopher, or poet is not above me. We are of the same element, of the same rank, and are fellows." This is one of those utterances of Rahel's that must be understood in connection with her individuality described above. Any one who interprets this quotation as boasting knows nothing of the individuality's certainty of self, as imperious as any other certainty.

Rahel's constant heralding of the value of individuality would not have been worth much, if she herself had not revealed it. From the beginning of her life to its close, from the first to

the last hour of each day, there never occurred with Rahel what she calls by a happy expression "life-pauses." We all recall hours and periods that were not permeated by the essential life of our personality; during which we allowed ourselves to drift; allowed the bowstring of our will to slacken, or let another draw it tight, while we acted, spoke, judged in a dozing condition of soul. There is scarcely any great personality in whom such pauses cannot be pointed out; in Rahel never. Sorrowful or glad, ill or well, resting or active, she filled the cup of the moment to the brim with the fulness of her being. We receive this impression from everything Rahel wrote and from everything that was written about her. That she lives in a "forest of people" no doubt hinders her, like every other social being, from extending her own branches as far as they could reach. But it transforms her nature no more than the beech, for instance, is transformed by the surrounding pine forest. She is herself, though not the *whole* of herself, as necessarily as is the growing tree.

*"Why should I not be natural?" Rahel exclaims. "I could not affect anything better or more varied."*

Again: "Even if I stood before the guillotine, I

should not be able to say what I am. I am helpful and I breathe, more than that I cannot remember."

These two contradictory utterances are significant. For Rahel's consciousness of her nature and worth is as real as her unconsciousness, a thing which only seems impossible to the untutored in self-knowledge, but which is the distinguishing feature in all great, original natures.

Just because Rahel at every instant is in perfect harmony, one quality balances the other; her excitability does not become hysterical, her sensitiveness sentimental, her wit ironical, her analysis vivisection, her directness does not become licence nor her consciousness a mirroring of self.

Thought and feeling, meditation and action, seriousness and gaiety, everything with her is of a piece; nothing contradicts or cancels, everything confirms and intensifies the rest in this harmonious nature.[1]

Rahel knew that the unconscious is the source of strength in our nature. Thus she says, for instance: "In proper, deep sleep the soul goes home

[1] Schleiermacher, the connoisseur of personality above all others, pointed out this very unity as Rahel's chief characteristic. See Chapter VI, *Social Life*.

and bathes in God's lake; otherwise it would not be able to endure."

But at the same time Rahel knows that the fundamental instinct of her being is the thirst for lucidity. Her honest and keen-sighted self-analysis tells her that this instinct in her is not merely the universal one of human nature, but that with her it is a self-defence: only by thinking over things do the joints of her being hold together, so explosive is the effect of personal experiences within her. She cannot take anything calmly; everything, so far as it has any power to affect her, is "insuperably important." Indeed, she is undoubtedly right that she would have been near to madness, if among her other passions she had not had that of thinking over things, not only suffering through them. Or, in other words, if in addition to her other sorrows she had not had that of thought.

"I must know, with regard to everything, how it comes about and how it is: thus ever since my childhood I have had the greatest desire to look at corpses." . . .

"I should have been a very incomplete creature in the eyes of all, if there had not existed in me a broad conception of the nature of all things and that forgetfulness of the personal, without which the most gifted

people on earth and in every branch of knowledge would not be gifted." . . .

"From my youth up my inner life has been rich and in accordance with truth. Nature acted keenly and truly upon keen organs: it has given me a firm, sensitive heart which always duly put life into all other organs."

Again: "One does not have such gifts as mine for nothing: they have to be paid for! My keen apprehension, with its power of definition and analysis, the great sea within me, my accurately adjusted, great and deep connection with nature, in short, the light amount of insight I have into it, which nevertheless is of so great value—all this costs me a good deal. What pangs, what uneasiness, what privations are necessary to make anything sprout, and how I have to prepare the soil!"

Rahel's childlike freedom from prejudice, already alluded to, shows itself most clearly in the ethical sphere, where she revalues current prejudices with equal boldness and thoroughness.

She well knows

"that the need of morality continues, but also that the conceptions of morality cannot remain unaltered. . . . The present age is sick with such old imaginings. . . . All existence is progressive, gains unceasingly in intensive vision; in this way earthly life is raised and that life which falls outside its bounds. The more insight we obtain, the more we shall come into harmony with life itself. . . . Life is not a dead

repetition but a development to insight and through insight. . . ."

But Rahel sees that this development is just what is least of all permitted in the sphere of morals. And thus existence is split into two parts, since one does not with an easy conscience commit the actions, the so-called "crimes," to which one is driven by development.

"We ought to submit at once to being called 'wicked' and taken to task, and yet we poor wretches go on with our little morals and our little laws! Sick Europeans I always call us in my own mind. . . ."

One of Rahel's new ethical ideas was that personal liberty involved the right to end one's life when one wished to suffer no longer. Against the talk of self-conquest and patience in suffering Rahel breaks out:

"Yet we cannot suppress our nerves and fibres, nor our wishes; are these last alone to be unholy? Ought we not to begin to regard them with the same pious awe as other works of nature, nay, as expressions of the deep craving within us to attain the right? I know that there exists only one intolerable evil; when one has not satisfied this need and one's conscience is therefore diseased."

During the last year of his life Heinrich Kleist

often visited Rahel, who suffered in his sufferings. After his suicide Rahel disclosed already the most highly developed modern views of such a "free death" (*Freitod*), to use F. Mauthner's new word for our new conception of this act. Rahel rejoices that her friend "did not prefer the unworthy part," and she knows that her understanding of him is now the only way in which she can honour his memory.

"I cannot bear that the unfortunate should drain their sufferings to the dregs. . . . Is every kind of misfortune to be allowed to fall on me? Is any wretched fever permitted to kill me, any block of wood, any roof-tile, any piece of clumsiness, but not myself? . . . . Courage it is and nothing else. Who would not leave a worn-out, hopeless life, if he did not dread the dark possibilities still more? Our liberation from what is desirable is already accomplished by the course of the world."

But voluntary death should be the conscious choice of a personality, not a precipitate act, Rahel thinks. She knows that only through the former do our so-called crimes become moral acts. Thus she, the worshipper of truth, can say: "Lying is fair, when we choose it, and an important item in our liberty; but degrading, when we are driven to it." She can say, in speaking of

a highly developed person: "He is so far in advance with his ideas that it can no longer be a question of whether he is good or not good: this lies far beneath him."

She knows that there exists a first innocence which knows nothing of evil; a second, which has reached the other side of good and evil, and she says: "Innocence is beautiful; virtue is a plaster, a scar, an operation." She knows how little this kind of virtue is worth: "People are all 'good' but they are of no use for anything."

She knows that personal morality is the most responsible. She expresses a thought which is in unison with one of George Eliot's: "Our actions are the children of our minds. . . . However they may turn out, we must put up with them; they have so independent a life that they are able to kill us. . . . They have children in their turn and become a whole race."

But while George Eliot uses the most serious ethical idea of the new age in order to inculate the old morality, Rahel has the courage to set aside the latter on important points.

It results from what has been said here that Rahel may more rightly be called a pre-Nietzschian than a romanticist. Like Nietzsche she practises

consideration for others, loyalty to duty, self-discipline, but like him she demands a revaluation of just those virtues which she practises, since each has found by personal experience what dangers to a fully human existence these virtues may involve.

A virtue, says Rahel, may be a much poorer thing than a passion, and "fulfilment of duty is often nothing else than a form of punctiliousness and officiousness!" She abhors the doctrine that patience in suffering is an unconditional virtue. Courageously to grasp what one's nature passionately demands was to her a greater virtue, and she underlines, with the fullest agreement, Goethe's words: "To be just in all things is to destroy one's own ego."

Rahel was too honest to believe that we can love others as ourselves except in the case of a very great and rare feeling. And she knew that her own propensity for putting others higher than herself was a weakness, not a virtue.

"Through my too great consideration," says Rahel, "I therefore am really destroying myself, who, strong in many ways, was intended for other things by carelessly prodigal nature. So it is! Thus I must continue to die: I have already died many times. . . ."

In connection with these words she makes the remark that she knows "something of the eagle's nature" is indispensable for living one's life, but that she unfortunately lacks this kind of nature.

When Rahel accuses herself of exaggerated consideration for others, which prevents her from living, in the full sense of the word, we must remember that she always lays stress on her unqualified courage in the domain of ideas and opinions. For no one's love will she ever sacrifice her "truer conviction," she says. And, as F. Schlegel said of her, speaking of her holding aloof from the numerous "brotherhoods" of the time, she was "far too eminent a personality" to be able to accept the slightest restriction of her mental freedom.

When she accuses herself of cowardice, it is thus exclusively in the sense that she has left her *personal demands of life* unsatisfied in cases where their satisfaction would have involved a want of consideration for others or for the accepted morality.

In one respect the ethical ideals of Goethe, of the romanticists, of Rahel, and of Nietzsche are in complete agreement: in the feeling that genuine morality first appears when one has found one's

own *essential nature* and acquired a good conscience of living according to this essential nature. But while the romanticists permitted a "living out one's life," like certain disciples of Nietzsche in our time—that is to say, where not the essential but the accidental is the motive force—Rahel, like Goethe, like Nietzsche, was convinced of the importance of making one's choice between essentiality and what is only coarseness or caprice, accident or fashion, among our inclinations. Thus, for instance, Rahel, like Goethe, disapproved of the romantic trifling with marriage, the dissolution of which Goethe thought justified when genuine feeling demanded it, but not on account of fashionable tendencies in sentiment, tendencies in which seriousness was absent even from passion.[1]

But, far more positively than Goethe, Rahel at

[1] Moral fanatics now make use of some words of Goethe's on the sanctity of marriage—words which were occasioned by the frivolous divorces of the time—to represent him as a guardian of the sanctity of marriage. That he dedicated the deepest feeling of his life to a married woman and could only decide after a very long time to legalise his own "free love" are facts, however, which ought to free Goethe from the suspicion of having seen in marriage the sole criterion of erotic morality, unless we would assert that his life and his teaching were in direct opposition to each other! But he who demanded that *every* function should be performed seriously, regarded the function of marriage as serious, and one for which he himself, according to his own words, was unsuited and therefore unwilling to undertake.

all periods of her life maintains the freedom of love, and the fact that the romanticists, and afterwards Young Germany, do the same has nothing to do with her opinions in this respect. She, like Rousseau, like Goethe, like the romanticists, like Young Germany, draws her erotic views from her own observation, from her own soul and its power of loving personally and passionately: none of them is the others' teacher, though the spirit of the age may give courage to acknowledge these views and to act according to them.

At every stage of her life Rahel asserts what I would call the wisdom of the heart, assuming that one really follows one's heart and does not create any of those "simulacra," the paltriness of which brings love's freedom into disrepute.

"The heart is entirely in darkness, entirely alone, one might say, and it alone knows everything best. Only by looking into it can one gain real insight, since none of the confused lights of the world penetrate there and since the heart, so to speak, takes its standard from another world; it has a yes or a no, nothing else."

"The more I see and meditate upon the strivings of this world, the more insane it appears to me day by day not to live according to one's inmost heart. To do so has such a bad name, because simulacra of it are

in circulation. . . . But pure as the seed-leaf of an almond is the inmost, true desire: what is sensitive is also holy!"

With Rahel as with the romanticists, Schleiermacher above all, the demand for love's freedom is a necessary consequence of the demand for *individualism*, for originality in every manifestation of life, above all those in which the personality reaches its highest expression: love, belief, creation. Rahel insists that only when a person follows his nature's inmost demands is he true to himself, and only when he is true to himself is he moral. She consistently applies this conviction in her judgment of people who in their erotic relations thus live according to their hearts. One of her female friends declared that nobody understood everything in the same degree as Rahel. But this reservation must be added: where she met with nature and truth. The artificial and false found in her an incorruptible judge.

Those natures that are most readily characterised by calling them pagan Hellenic, won Rahel's unqualified love. Pauline Wiesel, who enraptured men as the most perfect revelation of Aphrodite, was and remained Rahel's dearest

woman friend on account of the complete and naïve frankness with which she lived in accordance with her pagan nature. When Pauline left her husband, Councillor Wiesel, Rahel gave her complete approval; her "strong heart was not made to suffer," Rahel wrote. As the mistress of Prince Louis Ferdinand, and of many others, Pauline showed such inconstancy in her love, combined with such innocence, such ease of conscience, and such kindness, that she appeared like a Philine brought to life. The strength and genuineness of her nature inspired in Rahel not only unalterable devotion, but admiration.

Pauline's Greek, or childlike, or godlike, naïveté in the question of love's freedom, a right that appeared to her as incontestable as it did to the gods of Olympus, was as unlike Rahel's own conduct of life as possible. But Pauline, in Rahel's opinion, had thus led a more fully human existence than Rahel herself. Indeed, she compares Pauline with herself: "Nature has dealt largely with us both. . . . We are designed to witness the truth in this world. . . ." And Rahel complains that she herself has only witnessed the truth in the realm of thought, while Pauline has had the courage and the good fortune

to be true in action also to her inmost nature. Herself married at the time, Rahel gave the following unqualified expression of her sympathy for Pauline Wiesel: "She saw what I saw, understood what I understood; we laughed, observed, admired, and despised in common. . . ." She had a feeling for "the confirming and understanding existence in another." And when she seemed devoid of feeling, it was, says Rahel, "because she, like myself, suffered from too deep a sympathy. She and I," Rahel continues, "could be agitated like no one else." She was an experimental, warlike, "light-hearted, or rather light-lived nature"; "*I never found any one deeper, truer, or clearer.*" Rahel not only felt that she and Pauline both belonged in an exceptional degree to "great, dark, bright Nature, who produces life after life"; she even thinks that "nature intended to make one being of us, but she had to make two." And, therefore, Rahel adds, in one of her offhand utterances, which open up an infinite psychological perspective—"therefore she acts for me," that is, in those things where Rahel herself has not had the courage and good fortune, while perhaps Pauline felt that Rahel cultivated certain other qualities on Pauline's behalf!

Varnhagen, who felt hurt on Rahel's behalf by this comparison of herself with Pauline Wiesel, insists that the latter was a double nature, while Rahel's extraordinary power and charm depended on the perfect unity of her nature. And in truth Rahel's unity is of a kind rarely met with: genius, disposition, instincts, co-operate and strengthen each other, instead of being opposed to each other, as is usually the case. But Rahel herself so often laid stress on her dissatisfaction with the want of harmony between her *will* and her *courage* for action, that we must take her seriously and not praise what she herself called her weakness: that she did not *dare* what, in accordance with her inmost nature, with the approval of her conscience, she *wished.* She knows that it is often "one's better knowledge" that demands what society calls "sin"; that it may be a greater sin to allow life's possibilities of happiness to escape one or patiently to drag along the mistakes of one's life.

It is no ascetic or Christian conviction that hinders Rahel: it is the inborn resignation in her blood, and in her race; it is her father's tyranny, her physical weakness, the knowledge of her lack of charm—Rahel thought her appearance insignificant and quite devoid of attraction—that to-

gether break down her vital courage. And when once this is crushed, it is no more capable of flight than a broken wing. Rahel, like all great natures, was born self-sacrificing *and* exacting. That she had full opportunity for satisfying the first-named instinct never consoled her for the great debt life owed her. For she was convinced that her *whole* nature was "willed by God," and that thus her demands were as holy as her desire of self-sacrifice.

Pauline Wiesel is certainly the most decisive evidence of Rahel's attitude to love's freedom, but there are many other examples. Among them the Bohemian, Countess Josephine Pachta, whose blonde beauty and brisk amiability made her seem like a kindly force of nature, a sunny child of the woods. This friend became even dearer to Rahel when she threw away her brilliant external position to follow Meinert, the object of the love which thus made her sacrifice position and reputation. When Rahel is summing up the most significant impressions she has received from women, she calls Josephine Pachta the greatest female character she has known, since nothing could restrain her from acting according to her inmost nature.

When Dorothea Mendelssohn was separated

from her husband and lived for a number of years, before they could be legally united, in a free relationship with F. Schlegel, Rahel stood faithfully by them. A fourth of Rahel's friends, the actress Augusta Brede, lived in a free relationship with Count Bentheim. Rahel not only approved of her friend's conduct but stayed with her during her visit to Prague.

But on the other hand Rahel could not reconcile herself to the erotic-æsthetic flirtations of Henriette Herz, which never overstepped the bounds of "virtue," but exhibited just that kind of "simulacrum" which was antipathetic to Rahel while she declares, and proves in her friendships, that "I am indescribably fond of genuine frivolity!"

Among men also Rahel admired natures of the same kind as Pauline Wiesel's. Her favourites were, for instance, Prince Louis Ferdinand[1] and Gentz. The former visited Rahel's garret to find a sympathetic, consoling friend, whose friendship appeared to him "much sweeter than anything

[1] The erotic colour given to Rahel's relations with the prince by Fanny Lewald, in her novel *Prince Louis Ferdinand*, is entirely fanciful and without any foundation in fact. Rahel herself calls the relationship "almost entirely impersonal." It was to Rahel he complained of his inconstant mistress, Pauline Wiesel, and Rahel had the thankless task of trying to put matters straight between them.

else." Rahel perceived his "disorderliness" while at the same time she loved his exceptional soul and kept her promise of giving him direct "garret-truths" when he required them. Rahel lamented that their correspondence was lost, for it did credit to both: to her by the perfect frankness with which she told the prince home-truths, to him by the generosity with which he received them, feeling that the "little one," as he called her, always appealed to what was finest in his soul against his lower nature.

With regard to Gentz Rahel shows the same clear perception of his many faults and the same predilection for his inmost personality.

In this statesman and man of the world, so differently judged, usually condemned, Rahel had discovered a genuine "child's mind" with "the untroubled, pure truthfulness that produces lasting naïveté." It was this disposition that Rahel loved unalterably in this man, who was wanting in character just because he was like a child; a careless creature of the moment, who showed all his weaknesses with the most perfect frankness. Women excused them on account of his charming manners, men on account of his rich gifts, among which was his tactful way of making other people

appear to advantage. Thus, for example, he would only take up the thread of conversation after an interval of silence and hesitation and modest attempts to get a word in, and then, as one of the most brilliant conversationalists of his time, would spin it farther, fine as silk and varied in colour, as no one else could. Rahel, too, forgave him on account of this quality, which one may call as one pleases either lack of conscience, or freedom of conscience, or ease of conscience!

Rahel was to Gentz, as to Prince Louis, a mother confessor, a consoler, an oracle. He has the same profound understanding of her nature as she of his. Nothing is more characteristic of both than their letters at the time when Gentz, late in life, fell in love with the dancer Fanny Elsler with a young man's fervour. Rahel congratulated him in the warmest words on being still capable of such fine feelings at his age! While others had nothing but frivolous raillery for Gentz's passion, Rahel saw so deeply into his nature that she compared his feeling with her own for a child, that had proved her still to be possessed of "*ein Liebherz*," capable of all the pangs and joys of love. It throws light on them both when Gentz writes that Rahel was the only one to whom he dared to confess the feeling

which from an old man had made him young again, since she alone was deep enough to see in it the proof "that he had preserved within himself a pure and real humanity." And among the "floods of blessings" for his "paradisiacal letters," which flow from Rahel's heart to his, we find the words, that in the eternal youth of feeling, above all in the power of love, unvanquished even by years, lies the strongest proof of immortality: "Well formed hearts can always be in love and always wish to be." This is Rahel's final word on the subject of the love of Gentz's old age. And when Fanny Elsler came to Berlin, Rahel treated the young dancer, who was a mistress of the art Rahel so much admired, as a daughter.

Whether a love is called by the world unreasonable or reasonable, immoral or moral, unhappy or happy, matters nothing to Rahel in comparison with the conviction which she expresses somewhat in these words: that *loving* is the state of life that makes our days rich, bright, and full of meaning; that only through love does one learn to know one's own existence; nay, that love is to such an extent the kernel of life that even a semblance of it is capable of awaking our sympathy.

Some one censured in Rahel's presence a

woman who had begged a man for his love, even calling it a disgrace. Rahel exclaimed: "It was *stupid*, since it could do no good, but why disgraceful?" Rahel continued the conversation and swore by Heaven that never in her life had *she* controlled a weakness. And how *could* one do so? she asks. One's *actions* one can control, but one's heart, "which is soft, which is of flesh and blood, how could one turn it into brass?" How deeply the subject affected Rahel is shown by the fact that immediately after this conversation she had an attack of fever!

Another pagan nature for whom Rahel cherished great affection was Heine. He had some of the faults that Rahel particularly loved; some of the qualities she valued highly, but also that ruthless "ego-morality" which she only forgave when —as in Pauline Wiesel and Gentz—it was combined with a genuine naïveté. Heine lacked this, for he suffered from an ambition in which Rahel saw the cause of his want of balance, insincerity, vanity, and capriciousness. Rahel finely sums up her own highest ethical commandment, the commandment of individualism, in a single word: "Heine must become 'real'."[1] Since he possessed

[1] Rahel borrows the word "real" (*wesentlich*) from Angelus Silesius's verse: "*Mensch, werde wesentlich,*" etc.

no depth or seriousness, he lacked coherence in his personality and a synthetic view of existence, and this made Rahel uneasy. In spite of these defects, which, owing to Rahel's frankness, caused occasional periods of coolness in their friendship, Heine remained her tenderly cherished favourite, whom she believed in, whom she consoled, and of whose fate she felt an anxious foreboding.

From all this we may conclude that Rahel carried out her first and greatest demand on others as on herself, "to be true and upright," while at the same time she insisted that this honesty does not exclude, but on the contrary necessitates, that self-cultivation without which no one arrives at his *essential* nature. Like Goethe, she knows that "man is a work of art . . . material, artist, and workshop are within ourselves. How beautiful each success seems to us, how hard the reverse!" She regarded the years of one's youth as "the most virtuous, most beautiful, and easiest set on fire," and therefore she forgave youth "nothing *bad*, but a good many follies." She thinks older people are profoundly unjust towards youth, in expecting it to be wise without having yet had the opportunity of "*distilling the essence from the*

*tree of life.*" For Rahel says in another place: "Experiences are crude; their value is only that to which we succeed in ennobling them." And besides, what is the rationality of the elders? Seldom wisdom, Rahel thinks with perfect justice, but "usually only want of courage."

It was, moreover, her experience that, however a person may conduct himself, he nevertheless at every stage of his life acts in the last resort according to his character; that is to say, Rahel explains, according to the sum and substance of his quality; human beings like the air, move according to eternal laws. And to "have character" means to her merely to have courage, since this sets the other capabilities in motion towards their goal. Thus, while every one else called a Gentz or a Pauline Wiesel deficient in character, to Rahel they were characters; their courage to act according to the sum and substance of their qualities rendered them, as others called it, faithless, untrustworthy, weak, but as Rahel called it, sincere. Among the majority she found weaknesses equally plentiful, but with a good deal less honesty!

It was honesty and naturalness that Rahel

looked for in vain in European sexual morality; and it was on account of these deficiencies that she demanded reforms so thoroughgoing that even to-day they are called "destructive of society."

Freedom for love—which *is* morality—but war against unchastity—which is sexual relation without love—that is Rahel's fundamental idea, from her young days in her lonely garret till the late phase of her life, when George Sand is already appearing like a streak of fire on the horizon.

Rahel's sense of liberty, sense of truth, and sense of beauty are revolted in an equal degree by the sexual morality that is protected by society. Marriage is to Rahel an oppression, comparable with other forms of compulsion; an oppression that has given rise to the dual standard of male and female sexual morality and the compulsory fidelity in which the social lie triumphs. Rahel touches upon this subject sometimes seriously, sometimes in irony.

"It is hard that in Europe men and women should form two different nations: one moral, the other not. This will never answer—without dissimulation, and chivalry was one form of dissimulation. These few words are very true; they summarise much unhappiness and much evil. Some day a book will be written about this."

"I now perceive that human beings are so wicked, that they are obliged to make their *déclaration d'amour* before a priest and an official. They know one another!"

"Is not an intimacy without charm or transport more indecent than ecstasy of what kind soever? Is not a state of things in which truth, amenity, and innocence are impossible, to be rejected for these reasons alone?"

On another occasion she says of marriage: "Away with the walls! Away with the ruins of them! Let this pernicious custom be levelled with the ground, and then shall flourish everything that has life in it—a whole vegetation!"

She sums up the stains upon Europe in these words: "Slavery, war, marriage—and they go on wondering and patching and mending!"

Since the highest personal morality consists in being true, in every smallest trifle and at every moment, in "always proceeding from reality and not from appearance," coercive marriage must be the great social lie above all others!

Rahel asks: "How can an inclination subsist without charm?" She asks why people do not provide themselves with a legal, external guarantee for their relations of friendship, private or open, instead of allowing the duration of *these* relationships to be determined by their feelings? And on the objection about children she asks

whether home life as such is bound to be sacred? Whether the children really can *only* be protected by remaining in their home, when the parents are capable of physically and morally torturing them to death there?

She points out that it is as absurd as it is impossible and unreasonable to try by one's love to bind and restrict a human being in any action or at any point of his existence. Only those marriages which are contracted through mutual love, only those in which the free consent of *both*, not the right of either, determines the union, only those in which full, clear truth prevails, does Rahel regard as moral. And above all, behind the "closed doors" of matrimony the fullest freedom is a necessity. How little Rahel believed in the possibility of such freedom and truth in the existing institution of marriage, appears from her exclamation that those who are already married must remain so, but that she for her part would never be willing to sanction the marriage of a child of hers. She scorns "preconceived opinions *de luxe*" of all kinds, but especially those which have created the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children, and she would level this distinction as radically as those who are

striving at the present day for the right of the mother.

"Children ought only to have mothers and to bear their name, and the mothers ought to be in possession of the authority and power in the family: so nature ordains it. We have only to make nature more moral; to act in opposition to her—even as regards the solution of the problem in question—is never successful. Nature is terrible in this respect, that a woman can be misused and can bear children against her inclination and her will. This great injustice must be redressed through human intervention and dispositions, but it shows to what a great extent the child belongs to the woman. Jesus had only a mother. For every child an ideal father ought to be appointed, and every mother ought to be considered as innocent and held in as high honour as Mary."

It is characteristic of Rahel's attitude to her own sex that it was not among the blameless she, who was herself perfectly blameless, found her closest friends. And it is not from her own sex but from men that the most discriminating judgments of Rahel are derived. Rahel herself has no cause to complain of a woman not being permitted to think or to utter her thoughts, for she found listeners both eager and admiring in the foremost men of her time. Rahel uses a bad argument to defend woman's right to use her intellectual powers,

when she asks whether Fichte's works would have been inferior if Frau Fichte had written them? For this question could only carry weight if it were proved that Frau Fichte—or any other woman—actually had written Fichte's works. Then undoubtedly men would have been as willing to acknowledge that woman's force of thought as they acknowledged that of Rahel herself.

Fortunately it is not with such weak reasoning that Rahel elsewhere defends woman's right to make use of her intellectual gifts; to secure "room for her own feet" legally and socially; to be rescued from having to occupy herself only with trifles, and, in an intellectual sense, from having to be "worn away by her husband's or son's existence"; from being forced, through her husband's erotic coarseness, into insincerity and coquetry; from being of less account owing to her bringing-up and her existence.

Rahel says of women: "They are so surprisingly feeble, almost imbecile from lack of coherence. They lie, too, since they are often obliged to, and since the truth demands intelligence. And lying bores me to death. . . ." Again: "I know women: what is noble in their composition keeps together stupidity or madness. . . ." In a third place she speaks of women's "clumsy, terrible stupidity in lying."

That women nevertheless even at that time were able to find "room for their own feet," if they only had a strong enough will to do so, is proved by Rahel herself. Without financial independence, she nevertheless, when only in her twenties, succeeds in reading, corresponding, travelling, choosing her friends, and forming her social circle with the same freedom as a financially independent woman can do so now. If Rahel, after her father's death, still speaks of constraint, it is only in the sense that unintelligent and indelicate criticism, and a pretentious and irritable family circle are always a constraint. At that time this constraint was only exercised by the family; in our day it is still exercised by the family and by societies and other forms of social co-operation as well.

From every well-thought-out system of individualism—and Rahel's was as thoroughly thought out as it was instinctive—it necessarily results that any hindrance to the use of his powers imposed by society upon one of its members is tyranny, so long as the exercise of his powers involve no interference with the rights of others. And how much more true is this, when laws and prejudices have placed such hindrances in the way of half mankind! As an individualist, therefore, Rahel is a "feminist"

with all her heart and turns her irony upon those who, on account of preconceived opinions as to woman's nature, seek to exclude her from the so-called masculine spheres of work and thought.

"Has it been proved by her organisation that a woman cannot think and express her ideas? If such were the case, it would nevertheless be her duty to renew the attempt continually. . . .

"So many women miss their true vocation, that it can hardly make much difference if a few do so by writing."

Rahel reproaches women—in *her* time there was occasion for it—with humbly excusing themselves when they ventured to write a book! Why should not a woman write books, why should she not study at the universities, if she has "the intelligence and the gifts through which her studies will be really fruitful?" Why should she not work at the sciences, if she is capable of doing so? asks Rahel with justice. But in *our* day Rahel might have asked: Why must a woman write books, study, practise science—even when she has not "intelligence and gifts"? How Rahel, who exhorted every one to effect his own education, who thought that nature intended with every human being to produce an original, not a "manufactured

article," would have abhorred the school examinations and university courses of to-day, the factory work by which men and women are turned out by the dozen!

How Rahel, who knew that the liberation of our own true individuality "costs a whole life, full of effort," would have detested present-day parliamentarism and societies, administrations and committees, where the effort consists in suppressing the personality for the sake of the so-called result! How Rahel, who exclaims: "One spends one's life in institutions—fritters it away!"—would have detested the frittering-away of life that all such modern institutions involve! How she would have detested seeing the need of bread driving women together with men in the great herd, which only "desires and is quieted by food"! How she would have detested all those "women of the cause" who in our time confirm Rahel's observation "that insignificant people with little spirit become harder with years, while an increasing gentleness is the characteristic of the notable person and of the mobile spirit"! How Rahel would have abhorred the tyrannical treatment of each other's opinions, the cramping narrow-mindedness, the envious jostling, the petty importance of nobodies,

which the women's cause now exhibits everywhere, since, from being a movement for liberty in great women's souls, like Rahel's own, it has become a movement of leagues and unions, in which the small souls take the lead!

It was in the performance of motherly social functions—nursing and relief of distress—that Rahel desired to find "a regular occupation." But, no one would have been unhappier than Rahel if this "occupation," as is the case with organised co-operation, had fettered the freedom of her own initiative and actions. And a Rahel would be the first to assert now that there are other limitations of liberty and independence than those created by law and custom, namely those that arise from fashions and tendencies of the age, by which a person is carried away from his deepest nature and loses the power of self-limitation within his real sphere.

How Rahel with her lucidity of thought would have exposed the modern superstition that it is in *outward* departments of work that woman gives expression to her human "individuality," while a mother only acts as a sexual creature! How miserable Rahel would have found the modern

tendency that tries to turn the home into a mere Sunday treat, and motherhood into a mere production of children! How profoundly Rahel sees, in pointing out the final distinction between the essential being of man and woman, when she says that nature—she does not know from what economy—"keeps woman nearer to the plant"!

This "economy" is easily understood; it is because the tender life is woman's creation and because that life requires tranquillity for its genesis and growth; because powerful instincts, deep feelings, sincere relations only arise where calm and warmth, coherence and unity are to be found; because a woman taken up by the problems of external life, tied by obligations of public work, harassed by competition or the struggle for existence, no longer possesses the *psychological* qualifications which are indispensable in order that a child's soul may grow in peace and joy, surrounded by seriousness and affection; because, in other words, *children* need *mothers*, not only for their physical birth, but for their *human* bringing up.

Rahel hits the very centre of the spiritual task of motherhood when she says that, if she had a child, she would help it to learn to listen to its own in-

most ego; everything else she would sacrifice to this. To be successful in this, says Rahel, is the mother's loftiest task, her greatest talent, and those who do not fulfil the task, who do not possess the talent, are not worthy to be called mothers, but only breeders of children. That a number of children, Rahel knew this only too well, are ill-treated within the family fold; furthermore, that few mothers perform their high office well, all this Rahel insists upon, without its misleading her into any of the foolish proposals of the present day for remedying the evil.

Far from believing mothers to be incapable of improvement, Rahel would redouble their power and with it their responsibility. For the progress or ruin of humanity depends, in Rahel's prophetic view, upon the capacity of the mothers for performing their task.

I have elsewhere described Rahel's own deep feeling of motherliness, the feeling which made it one of the sorrows of her life that she herself had never had a child, and which caused her to find in the children of her relatives objects upon which she could lavish her stores of tenderness.[1] And every woman who has what Rahel calls "*ein*

[1] See Chapter III, Love.

*Liebherz,*" knows that a general love is not enough; that only the particular, personal, intimate love brings us happiness. Or, as Rahel in her later years expresses it: "*The life of our heart alone is true and real.* I knew this, even when I was actually a child; and, triumph! I know it still."

But a nature so constituted that it will "*only receive and only give from the heart*" becomes in this existence, as it still is, a tragic figure. And as such we shall find Rahel in what follows, according to her own unsurpassable definition of the tragic.

"Tragedy is something which we are quite unable to understand, to which we have to submit, which no prudence, no wisdom can do away with or avoid; to which our inmost nature drives, pulls, entices, and irresistibly leads us, and there holds us fast; when it destroys us, we are left with the question: Why? Why is this done to me, why was *I* made to this end?—and all one's mind and all one's strength only serves to grasp, to feel the desolation or to divert one's self thereat."

To sum up, I would maintain that Rahel, like Fichte, saw "the radical evil" in inertness and cowardice, but the way of life in courage and will;

courage to take all claims and all vital decisions in perfect seriousness, will to put one's whole personality into every situation in life and to bring to all vital questions the most perfect honesty.

But this makes Rahel in her ethics just what I have called her: a pre-Nietzschian. To him also courage, veracity, mental rectitude were the basis of all morality. And when Rahel speaks of feeling "wounded in her nobility," or thanks God that she is "born noble," she gives the word the same meaning as Nietzsche, when he shows that the word "noble" originally meant in Greek one who was something, who had a firmly united reality, which the cowardly and untruthful person has not. That Rahel's train of thought was a similar one is shown, amongst other things, by her connecting women's "lack of coherence" with their untruthfulness.

The final judgment on Rahel's individuality is, then, that she was a born aristocrat, who nevertheless, owing to her origin and circumstances, found herself hindered from showing the world her *whole* nature as confidently and freely as she had wished, but that in spite of this she remained, at every period and in every situation of her life, "Rahel

and nothing else." And one who can truthfully bear such testimony of herself has a right to be described by the greater, infinitely misused word: a personality.

## CHAPTER III

### LOVE

#### I

In spite of Strindberg, Weininger, and other despisers of women, our time has witnessed a rapid increase in man's appreciation of woman's personality. One among many signs of this is that marriages and love affairs between younger men and women who are a few or several years older than themselves, are becoming more and more numerous in our time.

Of course such connections have always occurred. But formerly they were due in some cases to the man's gratitude for help or appreciation, in other cases to calculation, to win a kingdom, for instance, an inheritance, or an appointment; sometimes, finally, they were the result of the charm certain women have preserved to an advanced age. What is new in our time is that the cause is more and more frequently mutual love. Stendhal

cites Mme. du Deffand, with justice, as a proof that "*l'amour passion*," which Rahel calls "the new European love," may arise at an advanced age. In our time instances might be multiplied. Love more and more frequently resembles that crocus which flowers in the autumn as well as in the spring. And, to complete the simile, the flower, which is innocuous in spring, is said to be sometimes dangerous in autumn.

Nowadays it is no uncommon thing to see a man who, like the young Spaniard Mora for Mlle. de Lespinasse, entertains an ardent love for a woman ten years older; or even, like the young Italian Rocca, for one twenty years older than himself. Rocca was seized by this feeling the instant Mme. de Staël bent over the litter on which the wounded youth lay. When his friends told him she was old enough to be his mother, he replied that that was one reason the more for loving her and that he would love her so devotedly that she would end by marrying him, as indeed she did. George Sand, the most wonderful of all womanly natures—fiery as wine, motherly as milk, healthy, fertile, and rich as the earth she trod, fascinating, uncertain, and dangerous as the sea which witnessed some of her love-adventures—

George Sand was loved by younger men, as well as by those of her own age or older. Elizabeth Barrett was some years older than Robert Browning, a difference in age which was of no importance to their happiness. Other famous women might be cited in this connection; I will confine myself to recalling George Eliot. Her marriage with Mr. Cross, who was thirty years younger than herself, was to me, and to many others, an enigma, until I heard an explanation from one who knew the circumstances. The "marriage of conscience" between George Eliot and G. H. Lewes, who could not be legally divorced from the wife who had deceived him for years, was apparently not founded according to my informant, upon true erotic feeling on *his* part, but only upon intellectual sympathy and devotion. George Eliot had never herself been the object of a great emotion, an emotion capable of extravagant acts—in other words, the emotion every true woman desires to have met with before she dies—until she found it in the young man whom she married at the age of sixty!

To these celebrated women, who found at last in a younger man the love they had dreamt of all their lives, Rahel also belongs.

Her marriage with a man fourteen years younger

was her only bold *experiment* in life, whereas her *views* on erotic questions were most unprejudiced. George Eliot, on the other hand, expended all her courage on her marriage of conscience, and not the shadow of a thought of reform in the erotic sphere is to be found in her books. Renunciation, submission, sympathy, fidelity are what she preaches. She accomplished the task, at that time extremely important, of showing that the evolutionary view of life included sufficiently powerful motives to produce all the old Christian virtues. But she never examines the value of these virtues from an *evolutionary* point of view! With a psychological intuition comparable only with Shakespeare's she revealed the dramas that take place among simple conditions of life and half-awakened souls: those of children and of the people. But George Eliot, in spite of the circumstances of her own life, no more extended the psychology and ethics of love and marriage than our even more gifted Selma Lagerlöf has done so. In this respect the importance of George Sand has been incomparably greater than that of George Eliot. Mme. de Staël and the sisters C. and E. Brontë have told us in two or three books more about the loving heart of woman than George Eliot in all her works; a Mme.

du Deffand, a Mlle. de Lespinasse, a Sister Mariana, a Rahel, have done so merely in a few letters.

In *Delphine* Mme. de Staël attacked indissoluble marriage; in *Corinne* she presented the tragedy of the gifted feminine personality: that of wounding her husband's prejudices on the subject of "womanliness" and thus weakening the erotic attraction of her own personality. Rahel herself went through the latter experience with Finckenstein and Urquijo, she expressed even before *Delphine* and long before George Sand ideas as rebellious as those of either French authoress. And while death soon solved what was problematical in Mme. de Staël's and George Eliot's last marriages, the union of Rahel and Varnhagen became a happy omen for those ties of love by which many a woman of the present day has attained the erotic consummation of her nature when already advanced in years.

Like Mme. de Staël and George Eliot, Rahel had already given her great emotion to another, and thus none of them experiences the happiness of loving as she is loved. But they discover that their *feminine personality, in its fully developed, gifted individuality, is capable of inspiring a great*

*love.* They are thus notable examples of the evolution of masculine love, which Mme. de Staël despaired of in *Corinne.*

Rahel's three love-stories are typical of the three fundamental forms of woman's amatory feelings: love of her own love, love of the man, and love of the man's love. They may pass into each other in a thousand delicate transitions, but in every woman's love one of these forms nevertheless predominates.

Man's love has at present only two fundamental forms: in love the majority of men love themselves, only a minority the personality of the woman.

And yet that is the only love the modern woman wants.

The new woman, whose victorious advance our time is witnessing, began to appear as early as the eighteenth century. One of her first manifestations was our H. C. Nordenflycht, equally remarkable for her poetry, her culture, her intellectual emancipation, and her power of love. Another was Mary Wollstonecraft-Godwin in England; in France many names might be mentioned, among which the first is Mme. de Staël. The German counterpart of these women is supplied by

Rahel and a few other notable figures, especially among the women of the romantic school.

What is common to all these women is that they do not look upon love as the majority of their contemporaries still did—as the playful Cupid, who only gave slight wounds—but saw in it the fatal figure of Eros. Love was not to them a brief episode of their youth, upon which they looked back with smiles or emotion—from the seriousness of life itself. These women possessed the highest intellectual culture of the age, exactly as Héloïse had that of her time. But this does not prevent them, any more than it prevented her, from abandoning themselves to a primitive, powerful, flaming, and consuming passion.

At whatever period and in whatever country a woman has loved with this great and entire love, it has implied in her the unity of soul and senses, and at the same time the demand, or at least the hope, to be loved as she herself has loved: with a love that envelops the man's whole personality, his human as well as his masculine characteristics.[1]

And Goethe's letters to Frau von Stein, Dide-

[1] See, for instance, *Lettres d'une Religieuse Portugaise*, edited by Karl Larsen; the letters of Héloïse, edited, from the original Latin, by Dr. Moth, and the letters of Mlle. de Lespinasse now published complete by Comte de Guerin.

rot's to Sophie Voland, show that even in the eighteenth century there were men who could love with the most delicate appreciation of the loved one's personality; who delighted in all its transitions, who wished to share everything with the beloved, from the solemn hours of thought to the fruits of the summer day, and who only felt rich when so sharing.

But on the whole both these women and these men were far in advance of their time as regards the emotion which Rahel calls "the new European love."

The first martyr of this love was Héloïse, who with her conscious will devoted her whole soul and all her senses to love; who preferred to be called Abelard's paramour rather than an emperor's consort; who with reckless honesty confesses her white-hot passion, her longing, her suffering, who feels with pride that her soul is made great by this fire, and that her fidelity to herself is her nobility. She already possessed the new woman's clear view of herself and of her love, and she already suffers the pangs innumerable women in our time have suffered, when they found that the man's love had never embraced their soul. In Héloïse we find already the unity of love, glowing passion, and

intense affection; we find defiance of the destiny which denies her the satisfaction of her need of love —the loftiest and purest need of her being—we find the courage to suffer, nay, to be crushed, rather than not to have loved, that is, not to have lived.

Héloïse has certainly had sisters here and there in the course of the centuries, though they have not had her power of giving expression to their souls.[1]

But the type of man these women had waited for first appeared in *Werther*, a man with such freedom of soul, so responsive a sensitiveness, so profound a need of love, that to him, too, love was the vital question; a man who could love a Héloïse-nature as such a "*grande amoureuse*" would be loved, with all his senses as a woman, but with all his soul as a personality.[2]

[1] See, among other works, Kurt Breysig's *Die Entstehung der Liebe.*

[2] Dr. W. Nowack, in his interesting study, *Liebe und Ehe im deutschen Roman zu Rousseau's Zeiten*, reminds us how during the Renaissance woman as well as man aspired to completeness of personality without any kind of "emancipation movement," since her right in this respect was undisputed; that even then spiritualised love appeared among exceptional natures and always without marriage, whereas Rousseau, on the other hand, was lacking in comprehension of the development of the feminine personality. Goethe, who had absorbed with every fibre of his

Rahel began by sharing the fate of the woman who is before her time, in not meeting the man who was worthy of her love.

The fact that young Count Karl von Finckenstein not only fell in love with, but also became engaged to Rahel, who was remarkable neither for beauty, social position, nor wealth, shows that he was a man who already belonged to the new age in spirit, although in other ways his disposition was not such as could sustain this spirit.

He and Rahel saw each other for the first time at the opera, and their profound love of music, which in him was united to a remarkable talent for singing, was the real community of souls which brought them together. They met in society, for Rahel was just then in the phase dur-

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heart the new gospel of the triumph of passion over reason, was the first to extend Rousseau's doctrine and to be the discoverer of modern love. Werther spiritualises his love into affinity of the soul, he is enraptured by what is individual in the loved one's being, by the poetry in her nature. In Stella Goethe sought already to resolve a matrimonial conflict in the spirit of our time, and he saw that the custom would have to be transformed, if it was not to become immorality. In all his works Goethe shows that reverence for the harmony and beauty of woman's soul, without which no refined soul-life is possible between man and woman, without which passion can be neither lofty nor enduring.

And what Goethe had begun was continued in Germany by the romantic school and Young Germany, and in France by St. Simon, Michelet, Stendhal, and others.

ing which she made up for some of the pleasure of which ill-health and mental suffering had deprived her in her first youth. She appeared at this time younger than her age, with a reserve of appetite for social enjoyments. Thus Rahel, who was already twenty-five, seemed more like other young women, and it was not until later that Finckenstein, who was a year and a half her junior, felt the oppression of Rahel's superior personality, while at first he had soul enough only to feel its charm.

He was a man who might have been purposely made to be idealised by Rahel. In the first place his nature had the refinement, ease, and grace of the aristocrat, which possessed the strongest attraction for Rahel throughout her life. In addition to this he was unusually handsome. His fine figure, his noble features, his mild blue eyes, the golden hair, fine as silk, which surrounded his forehead in natural curls, all gave him the appearance of a prince of fairy-tale come to life. His singing, his many-sided culture, his feeling for nature, and his admiration for Goethe, his impressionable sensitiveness, all made Rahel believe in a profound affinity of souls between them. And his letters, which, together with a lock of his wonder-

ful hair, were found among Rahel's private treasures after her death, are sufficiently full of meaning and warmth to make Rahel believe what he constantly assured her—that he belonged to her "for ever"; that she set in motion all the good within him, that she formed his personality, that he found in her a clarity and truth, a diversity and a strength of feeling as in no one else. The knowledge of her love makes him weep with happiness, as he reads her glorious letters under the flowering acacias, and when in her little room they look up together towards the stars he feels a perfect bliss.

Since she loved him herself, Rahel could not doubt his having strength of will enough to prepare a future for their love.

But how often is young love strong? As seldom as it is clear-sighted. In most cases this young love is an enchanting and intoxicating feeling that at last one experiences for one's self this wonderful thing of which poets have sung and round which one's dreams have circled; that one knows its suspense and anxieties, exchanges its expressions of tenderness, hears and pronounces its great and beautiful words! During all this Rahel, like countless highly developed young women before and after her, transformed Finckenstein into

something that he was not. Only by degrees did she discover that she did not know his real nature, that which only actions can reveal. The words, again, which lovers say or write to each other, only show what they wish to be or what they believe themselves capable of becoming, not what they are. When put to the test, Finckenstein proved to be a weak child, incapable of entertaining a great feeling, still less of fighting for the feeble one he harboured.

His father was dead and he lived on the family estate with his mother and his many sisters. These female relatives worshipped him with a jealous affection which grudged him to any other woman. And to this was added the aristocratic prejudice which was deeply wounded at the thought that he should introduce a wife of middle-class, and, what was worse still, Jewish, birth into their circle. No doubt some of the rich and handsome Jewesses of Berlin had made fashionable marriages, but this had not been a source of joy to the families they had married into. Thus Finckenstein's mother and sisters found many arguments to prove to him that his marriage with Rahel would turn out unhappily for himself! And so he begins, like all weak souls, to lament

his fate in his letters to Rahel. By turns he assures Rahel of his love and tells her that he cannot bear to see his mother and sisters suffer. Rahel, who loves him, still hopes "to love him into love." She believes his protestations, suffers in his suffering, and acts "foolishly and uselessly," as she afterwards called it, in holding to him as long as she believes in his asseverations. "*Neither of us was a hero*," she says, "*neither he in his way nor I in mine.*" But by degrees she perceives and at last she says openly, that he does not feel happy with her, nor she with him, in the same way, because she overawes him. She understands that his relatives are gaining power, while she herself is losing it, since he feels ill at ease under the influence of her strong personality. Time after time she gave him the choice between herself and his own people: he returned to her, but only to recommence his lamentations. Rahel did not hasten the decision, nor was she driven to it by wounded pride, but by the knowledge that no happiness could be real unless it was necessary to both of them. Their engagement lasted from 1796 to 1800, with unremitting protestations of love and tears on his part, interspersed with the inevitable assurances of a nature like his: that he did not

lack energy, but—that his heart suffered in causing pain to those nearest him!

And so the decision was the usual one in such cases. Rahel, who had most right to suffer, but who complained least, was sacrificed and the jealous, selfish, narrow-minded sisters carried off the victory.

So blind was the man who had won the first love of a Rahel. But it cannot be doubted that Finckenstein's feeling for Rahel was real enough to have enabled her to give him strength to decide otherwise. Most women in Rahel's place would have used all the resources their love, their suffering, and their personality gave them.

Rahel did not do so. She hoped to the last that his feeling was as strong as his words. When she saw that it was as pale and weak as his good looks, she gave up the struggle.

But she did so only after sufferings, in which all the bitterness of the past was mingled. Even to begin to hope had been difficult to her, who through her birth and early sorrows had become so convinced of being destined for suffering; who had stood in shadow by the way along which the fortunate passed, had stood with closed hands, certain that no golden apple would fall into her

grasp. And since the marvel had befallen her that life had opened her clenched hands and laid in them its most beautiful gift, she could not regard love as a thing to fight for. Even should she once more be lonely after having tasted companionship, humiliated after having been raised up, poor after having possessed riches—she must bear this rather than do violence to her inmost consciousness, the consciousness of the new woman: that no human being has the right to retain another by *any other power than that other person's inmost necessity*. Unless the requisite strength existed in the loved one himself, in *his* emotion, to ensure the happiness of both, there was no meaning to justify their union or to give it reality. It was no false pride, no ill-applied consideration, that determined Rahel. For she possessed in a high degree the knowledge that belongs to the new love: that one has duties in the first place towards one's love, above all that of sacrificing the unessential to the essential.

And when Rahel gave Finckenstein full freedom of choice, she still cherished in her inmost heart the lover's hope, that hope which can live even on improbabilities, that he would choose her. He showed, on the contrary, how right one of Rahel's

friends had been in comparing his heart to a toy watch, with figures and hands but no works!

Rahel was left disappointed, not only of her happiness, but disappointed in her lover's nature. She did not accuse him; he had acted, she said, according to his nature, the fault was hers, who had not seen what his nature was. But such a perception is never a consolation, or at least the way to such a source of consolation is very long. Rahel now felt, like others who have gone through similar experiences, that all blows are light in comparison with that of finding one's self deceived in a person. It is this pain which may make the very joints of the personality go to pieces, which may bring a dissolving poison into the spiritual organism. And natures like Rahel's are above all exposed to this pain. For they have a boundless confidence in the nobility of others, and all life is suddenly thrown out of gear when this confidence is shaken through the very person who has inspired it. The traces of such suffering are never effaced.

Yes, there is always a drawn sword between us, and life after this, just as it smiled most brightly upon us, suddenly took us by the throat like a murderer. Our childlike confidence in life is im-

possible when we have discovered that it does not mean well by us. And Rahel, who had already suffered so much, thought herself destined for unhappiness. She expresses the experience of herself and many others in a profound word when she speaks of the *sense of guilt* one feels through sorrow. This feeling is not the brooding over the faults and mistakes through which one may have helped to bring about one's own sorrow. No, it is, as Rahel says, the sense that one is no longer one of nature's pure beings, a worthy sister to all its calm, healthy, beautiful creatures, since one has undergone the ill-treatment, has sunk into the despair, in which one would have thrown away existence merely to escape suffering.

"Oh, do not think that what I tell you is exaggerated. I am only afraid, when anything happens to me, that it is everlasting. To wound a sensitive spirit is to destroy it. If I showed my wounds they would remind you of the shambles. . . ."

"Acquaintance with misfortune is degrading, that is an opinion I will never relinquish. One is no longer a pure creature of nature, no longer stands in the relation of a sister to the calm things of life, when once, terrified by pain and humiliation, one would gladly in one's despair have given one's life not to be able to feel pain; when one has seen cruelty in *everything*—all nature. . . ." "One has to look forward either to

madness or to death or to recovery. Neither of the first two has happened to me. But still I cannot say that I am better; I have got over it, let me say. . . ."

"What I have not received I can forget; but what has happened to me I cannot forget. God protect any one from understanding this."

From this time Rahel no longer felt herself indivisible, that is to say, she lived with two views of the world: one of *inmost* despair, which had become her direct view; the other life-loving, which was no longer direct, but was the hard-won faculty of continuing to impart the riches of existence "*more purely, more willingly, and in greater variety than any one else.*"

Rahel saw Finckenstein again eleven years later, the same year that he died. And how deeply she had suffered is shown by her words, both after their meeting and after his death. He came to her "cold as a frog, shamefaced as a knave caught in the act"; he talked about his handsome wife, and Rahel afterwards wrote some pages in her diary which show that she found the explanation of her inability to inspire a real love in Finckenstein in her own lack of beauty, charm, and power of attraction. But after his death she feels once more that the contempt he inspired in her when

alive has not disappeared. For death could not alter her judgment of his paltriness.

It may be disputed whether Weininger is right in his opinion that the chief component of genius is memory. It is certain, however, that this is a fundamental condition of depth of feeling. Rahel was one of those who are never induced by death or lapse of time to change their feelings. Her heart had cried aloud "murderer," as Finckenstein sat calmly before her. And she *would* not change this heart of hers, which nature herself had fashioned "*rebelle et douce.*" A sea of bitterness rose within her at the thought that *that* man had had this power over her, nay, still had it.

"I felt like an animal that belonged to him. He had had it in his power to devour me. . . ."

"But out of every flame I have hitherto brought my heart unscathed, and this heart, even when it is deeply stirred, lives entirely for itself. . . . If by a magic ring he had yesterday been able to undo all that has passed in these twelve years, he would have had the power, if he had wished, once more to possess himself of my whole life. But this vice in me—(how shall I otherwise call it or regard it? I do not reproach myself; I know my heart perfectly: it must love; it is faithful, for it is strong and whole)—this vice is called virtue in women who are favoured by fortune!"

Rightly to understand the force of these words

it must be remembered that when Rahel wrote this she was engaged to Varnhagen.

The most lenient judgment she passed upon him was severe enough: that he was a child, destroying values of the greatness of which he was unconscious.

During the first few weeks after the rupture, Rahel was helped in the best possible way by an illness, which gave her time and an excuse for fighting her way in solitude to resignation. When she then began, with the receptivity of the convalescent, to reopen her mind to new impressions, a friend, the Countess von Schlabrendorf, took her with her to Paris. The wealth of experiences this visit occasioned, came at the right time. Rahel's full receptivity and her shrewd apprehension are shown in her letters to those at home, among whom both Jean Paul and F. Schlegel consider that a truer picture of Parisian life and of the French could not be imagined.

But Rahel's best help in her efforts to regain her love of life came from a young compatriot.

This was a youth of twenty, named Bokelmann, who was sent to her by a friend they had in common. With unusual good looks he combined a

soul as open as a flower. He attached himself warmly to Rahel just at the moment when every heart is most susceptible of affection: when its wounds are beginning to close.

The young man's appreciative sympathy acted like gentle breezes upon trampled grass. Blade after blade rose again and caught the dew and the sunshine.

But Rahel was not yet ready for a new love, and her delight in the rich, pure, young feeling that she encountered did not develop into any other kind of love than that in which one desires nothing, in which one "does not wish to possess the lovable thing, but only to see it bloom." And when they part, after a couple of months of each other's society in Paris, we see from Rahel's letters that she is also trying to transform his inclination into the fine feeling without a name, which Rahel so well characterises in saying that we can delight in each other as we delight in and love a lovable child, met by chance, a happiness which may belong to every one and which does not involve any desire to possess the object loved. And on both sides, after a few years' correspondence, the relationship became nothing more than a beautiful memory.

On her way home from Paris Rahel visited a married sister at Amsterdam. She took in the natural beauties and art of Holland and Belgium with fine appreciation.

And all the glories of art she had become acquainted with on this journey made her long for Italy. But, as she says later, the good fortune of "seeing Italy with my senses and a joyful, strong heart" never fell to her lot.

That she was again capable of longing, and that this longing turned to the south, proves that she felt once more that love of life which she had thought extinct.

She expresses her consciousness of the change in the words: "Without wishing to do so, we are always playing *rouge et noir* with ourselves; whether we win or lose we feel that we are thus *living*."

Even during her deepest suffering Rahel had told herself that life had still some sources of joy left, though they were then obscured by sorrow.

Through Bokelmann she had experienced "as much of love as was needful."

"Some one must be rejoiced by what was a necessity to us and what our never-resting conscience bade

us create; and so we begin again to take delight in our work."

She could now return consoled to her garret, though filled with the resignation which makes one still young feel old.

"My soul has regained its peace, my mind its equilibrium, my spirit its due elasticity. . . ."

"When all is said and done, all our tears and bitterest suffering are only about possession; but one can never possess anything but the capacity for enjoyment. . . ."

"What really makes people thoroughly unhappy is, that they cannot make up their minds *not to be happy*. But when once we are thrust into this, *old age suddenly sets in*. Our aspirations are no longer directed to the infinite; we parcel out life and live, as we say, for the hour. 'Tears, splendour, and fury have an end.' We stiffen, grow kind, and get wrinkles. Old age comes suddenly—like every other perception—not gradually, as people think."

In true old age, however, resignation is precisely our only means of still feeling young. And Rahel was still a long way off that age.

No trait is more significant of Rahel's nature—and nothing makes her to a greater degree our contemporary—than her never regretting the love which had caused her so much suffering, nor yet

trying to persuade herself that she will never love again. She knows that "they who have pain, have yet the most of life."

"Like Posa, I have *lost*. But I should not wish to be one of those who do not hazard themselves. . . ."

"He who goes about in this hard world without armour on his breast must be wounded. I did not know this. The terror of it is the worst, and when one still looks upon bleeding as death. Wounds will still come, but no longer unexpectedly."

And in this trait the great nature reveals itself. They only live who are lavish of themselves.

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Rahel expressed a great truth when she said that privileged souls, regal natures, long remain innocent; that they only learn with difficulty to perceive that there is such a thing as baseness, and constantly ignore this experience in the sense that they return again and again with confidence to men and life, in spite of their having neither forgotten nor avenged the wrongs they have suffered.

Rahel herself was one of these natures, who remember the evil without the memory having a warning effect, who learn from all experiences

except from this, that there are natures less noble than their own.

And thus the experience of sorrow could not prevent Rahel from loving once more, and this time again a man who was to make her suffer far more deeply.

Rahel had now reached the dangerous age in a woman's life, the age of thirty, when, as never before or after, a woman is ready for love in the full sense of the word. Of the Northern woman, at any rate, and as such Rahel may be regarded, it is true that in her first youth she only loves with her soul. But at the age we speak of her senses as well as her soul are awake; with her whole being the woman then desires the consummation of her nature through love and motherhood. She still desires it with the whole freshness of youth, but with a new strength. The girl's love-longing has life before it; the mature woman knows she must soon begin the descent, and that with every year the possibility becomes greater of her being compelled to die without having lived, in life's own holy and full sense.

Few are the natures that use up their whole power of loving on a first love. And least of all was Rahel one of them. The tempest of spring

had broken a branch just when it should have flowered, but a fresh warmth in the air was all that was needed to make all the buds burst.

This came about when, in 1802, Rahel became acquainted with the man who was the object of the great love of her life, that love which never comes twice in a human life, for which every earlier love is only a preparation and of which every later one is only a memory. It is this love that makes all the forces of the being rise as the spring floods rise in rivers and streams; that fills the whole being as the wine-press is filled with the ripe grapes of the vineyard; that collects in a sacrificial cup all tears formerly shed in sorrow or gladness. This love is never unrequited, it is always the dæmonic attraction of two beings. This irresistible and fateful passion may unite for their happiness or their ruin two beings fully worthy of one another. But it may also force together two beings of very unequal worth to the misfortune of one or both. And such was Rahel's fate in the love that turned her whole being to flame and burned her youth to ashes.

It was psychologically necessary that this fate should befall Rahel in the person of a man in all respects unlike Finckenstein, unlike him as the

south is unlike the north or the red blood unlike the blue.

The Spanish Secretary of Legation in Berlin, Don Raphaël d'Urquijo, was introduced to Rahel by his Minister. All the rare beauty and chivalrous charm of his nation was present in him, together with the directness and vivacity of the child of nature, which always exercised the greatest attraction upon Rahel. Urquijo came from his country home in northern Spain and his exterior was typical of the Basque race. His refined features possessed nobility and strength in the same degree, his eyes were such as Velasquez painted, now flaming, gleaming fires, now deep, dark wells. His Spanish dignity and southern charm were united to a natural ease which made his every movement graceful. His voice had the music that ennobles even the commonplace word and renders that of affection irresistible.

To all these charms was added the novel singularity of his foreign nationality. This has at first the effect of a mysterious and personal peculiarity. It requires time to discover that this interesting quality, which allures one with its unknown treasures and strange fascination, only

belongs to the nature of the nation or race, not to that of the person himself.

With Urquijo as with Rahel love appeared at their very first meeting, and the time that immediately ensued was a very happy one. They were united by sympathetic exchanges of ideas, sincere affection, and erotic attraction. The only uneasiness in their companionship was due to the scruples his sense of honour imposed on him in regard to a youthful love affair in Spain, scruples which, however, were soon removed, as Urquijo heard that this love of his youth had thrown him over long before he had ceased to love her. But now a more serious conflict arose, between Rahel's frank and generous nature, her confident love, free from all jealousy, and the Spaniard's sensitive and jealous feeling of proprietorship. Besides the inevitable misunderstandings due to their ignorance of each other's national customs, others constantly arose, through this difference in the manner of their love. Rahel, who attributed to Urquijo nothing but great, pure, and good feelings, hoped that his jealousy, however unreasonable, mad even, it seemed to her, was nevertheless a proof of the strength of his love. She did all she could to show him how dearly she loved him.

But she could not love wildly and jealously like a Spanish woman, she had to love with the loftiness and wholeness of her own nature. And it availed her nothing that she was perfect in her generous purity of soul, in her childlike confidence. For just these qualities, which proved her devotion, seemed to him to prove her coldness.[1] That Urquijo himself took an erotic relationship seriously is shown not only by the scruples lately mentioned but by the fact that he afterwards married a Berlin girl, insignificant from every point of view, who had become his mistress. But he could not see the earnestness of Rahel's feeling, because it was so unlike his own. It was an external difficulty that Urquijo only understood but could not use the German language and that Rahel did not know Spanish, so that their correspondence, except when now and then Rahel relapses into German, like their conversation, was carried on in French. Only a small part of their correspondence has been preserved, but from this remnant one can form an idea of what Rahel's

[1] "Love is the greatest of convictions"—eye, ear, feeling, heart, are all irresistibly convinced; if one can resist, then one no longer loves; that is why only *human beings*, that is, "lofty beings, capable of conviction," love—this is one of Rahel's profound sayings of love.

letters must have been, which Varnhagen was afterwards permitted to read and in which he found such "exuberance of life," so glowing a warmth, that he could imagine only one counterpart, Rousseau's letters, also destroyed, to Mme. d'Houdetot. Of Urquijo's letters only a few unimportant notes remain.

The conflict which finally parted Rahel from Urquijo was not, as with Finckenstein, the old-fashioned one between love and the prejudice of birth. It was an entirely modern one, between the man's and the woman's way of loving. And in this case it was further complicated by Urquijo's having not merely the Spaniard's, but much more than the Spaniard's share of jealousy in addition to a poor measure of self-confidence.

Where there is an Othello, an Iago soon appears. This part was here taken by Urquijo's friend, a Spanish count, who had proposed to Rahel but had been rejected, and now constantly put forward Rahel's superiority as a ground for Urquijo's distrusting her. When Rahel found that her numerous friendships and social pleasures were looked upon by Urquijo as a theft from him, she gave up society, moved into the country, and saw no one but him. But not even this could convince

him. Thus passed a year and a half, during which Rahel could reckon her happiness in moments, while her distress increased with every day. His power over her was still the same. After the most agitated scene a tender word from him is able to "heal her soul completely," to open her heart anew, to awaken her love again and again, and cause it to flow to him. How is it conceivable, asks Rahel, that his morbid distrust should not be curable and that they should not end by being happy since they love one another; since they are both good, simple, pure in heart, in other words have everything that is necessary to be able to love? For one cannot love, Rahel continues, with profound truth, unless one has these essential qualities; the same that are necessary for religion. How can he think she has too much genius to be able to love him? Her whole genius is nothing but her power of loving! Does he not see that "the magic works so" that she belongs more and more to him; that his presence constantly frees her from a sense of pain? She tells him that, whatever may happen, her heart belongs to him for life—and ought not *she* to know this better than he, since the heart is hers?

How can he disapprove of her letting every one

see her feeling? Is it not a woman's nobility to be able to love? Indeed, women have no other rank and no other position, and she for her part would always show her love, would never conceal the fact that she lived only for him.

"Faithfulness is a matter of course, it is a condition of love. Without a faithful spirit one cannot love at all—cannot live, I might say; for what does one know of one's self, unless one feels one's self to be true? Without this one could not recognise one's self! . . ."

"How I love you, your soul! Believe me, I understand it, penetrate it; none of its movements escapes me. Mine is worthy of it, and I divine yours. *That* is my genius, my wit; never believe that I have any other than this! I am made to love you, and that is all. . . . What a marvel that you love me! Yes, I believe it, but it is much. . . ."

She begs him not to divide his intelligence from his heart. For, if we rightly listen to the former, it always confirms the latter. She tells him again and again that her appearing incomprehensible to him is due to his failure to perceive how she is one with her love; how entirely unworldly she is; that she is "*simple even to stupidity*," and that this is just the quality she loves in herself.

At every moment when she has been in harmony with him, she has felt the religious consecration of

their love and hoped that it would hallow their whole life. For even now love makes one of them holy to the other, and she relies upon his seeing that their union—"full of soul, of feeling, of uprightness of heart"—is the only reality, while his doubts are nothing but unreality.

How great—and how imprudent—is Rahel, in her assurances that she relies upon his love! But those women who want to put their lovers' affection to the test are, according to Rahel, either "*mad, or they are lying, or they do not love.*" She would wish to take all suffering upon herself, so that he might be spared pain, and still she would be happy in the midst of her sufferings, if only he loved her. She tries to get him to see that love, when it is genuine, is "*a force of the heart, a fire of the soul, a unity of the spirits, a purity of the whole being*"; nay, that this warmth of the heart is the same that has founded religions and won battles, that has reared the fabric of existence and formed all holy bonds.

She complains that nature and circumstances have denied her the revelation of her soul through outward beauty. For it would have been her highest happiness thus to reveal herself to him, "for whom alone I would buy every attraction

with my blood, for whom alone I live and would wish to be beautiful."

When Urquijo, before a journey, had rested a few hours at her home, she told him afterwards how she had sat by him and rejoiced at his calm sleep; how she watched over him like a sister, like a woman who was his as surely as the heart in his breast; how the air around him had glowed with tenderness, and how she had intertwined their souls and raised them both in a silent prayer.

It remained to Rahel an everlasting, tormenting enigma that a woman, who thus showed the unity and intensity of her feeling in every action and every word, should not be able to convince its object of it. For it was manifest as the warmth of the sun, the freshness of the air; why was it not seen and respected as much as these great things of nature?

And when she was forced to tell herself again and again that he yet doubted, all existence became incoherent, as though its fundamental laws had been cancelled. If Urquijo had not returned her love—that she could have understood and submitted to. But Rahel's whole being rebelled against this ill-treatment of her feeling, this blindness to her nature, this impenetrable and cruel riddle.

Among Urquijo's letters are a few lines, written during an illness, which give a clue to the understanding of the riddle, especially if we look at them in connection with his subsequent history. He writes: "*Your calm, which under other circumstances would have caused me unhappiness, somewhat relieves my hard lot. I will see you as little as possible, unless you desire the contrary. You must be able to guess the reason. Your words console me, but your presence adds fuel to the fire.*" When, later, Rahel asked herself with bitterness why he believed in the insignificant girl who became first his mistress and, when he was sure of her love, his wife, perhaps the answer was this: that she gave him that proof of her love which Rahel had not given, and which, to the southern lover, is the only convincing proof. To this it must be added that Urquijo with good reason found himself inferior to Rahel, and that he saw her interest in her gifted men friends. Urquijo doubtless suffered deeply from his incapacity for conviction, just as Rahel suffered from her inability to convince him.

Indirectly Rahel has confessed that she regretted the want of courage which prevented her from surrendering herself completely to love,

when she compares herself with Pauline Wiesel and praises the latter's courage, which, together with her irresistible charms, gave her a different fate.

"There is a difference between us: you *live* everything, since you have had courage and fortune; I *imagine* most of it, since I have had no fortune and was not given courage—not the courage to force my happiness from fortune, to pluck it out of her hands. I have only learnt the courage of endurance," Rahel writes to Pauline Wiesel.

Rahel complains also of the error of "madly letting one's life run away in pain, imbecility, aridity, sand, and chaos, regardless that no drop flows twice, and that one is committing a theft and an atrocious murder upon one's self. Simply because we are everlastingly seeking an approbation that is really indifferent to us, and are not brave enough to say boldly in the face of mankind what *we* desire and demand. Nothing is so holy and true and so direct a gift of God as a genuine attachment; but this will always be resisted in deference to an approved cipher. We allow ourselves to be burdened with what is most foreign to us, and thus our true selves are lost. . . ."

"Only inclination and the heart's desires! If I cannot live for them, if I am too pitiful, too abject, too down-trodden and misused, then I will henceforward explore them in myself and *worship* them. It is God's strong will in the heart—the dark heart, heaving with blood—that has no name among us, and therefore we cheat ourselves, until it is dead."

Even if these utterances are based upon many experiences, others' as well as her own, it is nevertheless probable that some particular neglect of the call of passion was in Rahel's thoughts when she wrote these words. But if it was what is hinted at above, then it is certain that Rahel's want of courage was not due merely to the considerations she mentions, but, as with many other women, to the conviction that she lacked the power to charm which makes the bold stroke successful. The man whose love Rahel was to keep, must, she felt, coalesce with and understand her soul.

Here lay probably the focus of all their contradictions: that between northern and southern blood, between the love of a man and that of a woman and between a highly developed woman and an ordinary man, who were moreover of different races and nationalities. And finally the contrast between two widely different temperaments and two widely different conceptions of love.

It is this last antagonism which makes Rahel's misfortune typical of the developed women of our time. Rahel was one of the ever-increasing class of women who no doubt have their share of sensu-

ousness but do not try to win the man by means of this, desiring rather that sensuous unity shall be a result of the combined flame of two souls. Men, on the other hand, feel more attracted, and believe themselves more loved, by those women who by the power of their own sensuousness awake that of the man, and thus, if they themselves possess a soul, by degrees win his soul also. The purity and truth of Rahel's nature made her incapable of using the kind of means by which such women retain and dominate men. And it was Rahel's unspeakable torment to see Urquijo's feeling dwindle through what she felt to be the strength and beauty of her own. Rahel's love also included passion; but this was only the surf in a sea of devotion and fidelity.

From Rahel's words one can understand the nature of Urquijo's complaints. Among the scenes which were repeated daily, she had described one, which gives us an idea of the rest.

They were walking together in the Thiergarten, when Rahel caught sight of an unusually pretty woman, unknown to her, and wanted to look at her more closely. This interest of Rahel's in another than himself made Urquijo furious, and when Rahel sighed at his reproaches, he exclaimed:

"Finckenstein treated you badly too, you ought to be used to it."

At these words Rahel went through one of those moments when our existence breaks in pieces, moments in which all our surroundings are impressed upon us with the utmost clearness. Rahel always remembered that when these words were spoken they were standing "in the depth of the wood, facing the water, in the evening sun," and she answered: "If those words had been spoken in a play, the hearers would have shuddered and burst into tears." "That is true," he replied. "But that ought to set you free from me and show you that we cannot live together."

Rahel had held out as long as she believed in his love, had even held out when he said: "I love you but do not respect you"; said that he believed she deceived him with others; said that she did not love him. But when at last he said that he respected her but did not love her, she found strength to free herself, though every fibre of her body trembled with pain and every drop of her blood was filled with the charm he still possessed for her and never lost.

So long as he had spoken of his own love, of his doubts of hers, while all the time he was goading

hers to madness by his jealousy, a rupture had appeared to her impossible. Now, as she afterwards said, she found courage, but only in indignation at his unworthy treatment of her, only in the conviction that now "the value and possibility of her existence" were at stake, although it was still "the purest flame that consumed her heart."

"Once I lived entirely for one person. I loved him to madness! For he, his aspect, was to me the present and the future,—and in a certain sense this was true. And in my soul I never thought I should give him up."

"I lied: I did not utter my heart's demands, the claims of my person, lest I should hear in words the murderous No; I let myself be smothered, since I would not be pierced through. Miserable cowardice! Unfortunate being that I was, I wished to defend the life of my heart; I placed myself in front, I placed myself behind, I lied and lied and lied."

"Even in the greatest passion one ought not to allow one's self to be torn and dragged along so degradingly by pain. We abandon ourselves to love, whether good or bad, as to a sea, and then our luck, strength or art of swimming takes us over, or else it swallows us up as its own. As Goethe says: 'He who abandons himself to love, does he take any thought of his life?. . ."

"Then, armed for murder, I seized my own heart and went, as though out of life. For I knew it was a dark death I was going to, and I wrote: I choose

despair, which I do not know. It was a slow murder. And there arose a desolation more terrible than pain, rupture, and loss of the beloved. Blame me, as I myself blame this cowardly baseness. But consider this: that nature had given him a fascination for me, and thereby given me an infatuation, which the clearest consciousness of thought was not rapid enough to counteract. The *impression* was stronger. *That* is love."

"All this life has been snatched from me, even did I carry heaven within me. . . . I feel a whole flood of tears in my breast over my heart, and a single thing is enough to remind me of all. Nothing appears to me isolated any more: I feel wholly a prisoner. I do *not* console myself with the *higher* life! This would not exclude a beautiful *earthly* life. Every moment heightens and intensifies my intimate, ever deeper sense of the inconceivable loss!—No joy reaches to my heart; like a spectre he stands outside and closes it with a giant's strength, and only pain comes in. This spectre, this distorted image—I love. . . ."

"Oh, this one favour true grief grants us, when she forces upon us the reflection that *she never can return*, that she has really cut us off from that part of our life which she so cruelly tore. So it has been with me." [End of 1806.]

In her first despair Rahel told herself that Urquijo had never loved her, since he could be so blind to her deepest nature; and she calls both him and Finckenstein merely "shadows, coloured by my fire." But even in the face of this thought

Rahel had the strength of soul not to wish to erase from her life any of the events that had condemned her to remain solitary, though people crowded about her, and to "be compelled to die unsatisfied," though she herself had a world to give.

"Pangs of the heart are benefits, love-sorrows, slighted love, bliss. . . .

"*Therefore I regret nothing.* And I repose deliciously upon the torments and outrages I have suffered as though upon laurels and fairest myrtle. He who probes as I have will fare no better. My suffering is too human and *too great* for a little wailing!"

"Never have I lived and never said what life is: a love which does not turn to poison or remain with us as pain."

Often as she asks herself, like countless other women, why her loftiest feeling has been the most outraged, she yet feels in her heart the certainty that is made up of innumerable, indescribable, and unutterable things and that cannot be destroyed by brooding: the certainty that in spite of all she was really loved by Urquijo. And when, several years later, he again visits Rahel and she is thus prompted to read his letters again, she feels that these, as surely as her own, were the expression of a real love. She then determined to put

to him the question which she had turned about like a dagger in her soul for days and nights without number, whether he had really *believed* that she deceived him? When Urquijo vehemently protested that he had never believed it, all the horror inspired by years of meaningless pain gathered in Rahel's face and voice, and she exclaimed:

*"Then why did you say so?"*

Urquijo did not answer the question, but declared in the greatest agitation that for one who loves there is no peace; that *he* in particular had a very unhappy heart; that he constantly felt himself to be the least handsome, the least amiable, the least significant of men, and therefore could not believe in a woman's love.

That Rahel calls this his "old litany" shows what an important part his want of self-confidence had played in the conflict, and that she underestimated the genuineness of Urquijo's suffering. He declared, for instance, again and again that it seemed incredible to him that such a rare being as Rahel could love a man like him. Thus Rahel, who was hoping for a drop of consolation, that he might at last see and acknowledge her love, did not obtain it. As she herself says, Urquijo thought she wanted reparation for her feminine

virtue, and *that* he gave her. But what she was longing for with her whole burning soul—reparation for her love—was not forthcoming.

And the idea never occurred to her, who saw him glorious as a young god, that with him as with her the frail wings of self-confidence had perhaps been broken in childhood.

The only defence she found for him was that he had killed her as innocently as "the axe that beheads a great man," since with *his* nature he could not even divine the existence of such a being as she was!

But she did not thereby explain the mystery, she only removed it to the sphere of the unconscious.

The delicate threads that with irresistible power bind one human being to another were spun thousands of years before we were born, by innumerable beings that have gone before and countless mysterious influences.

When, in later years, others were surprised at Rahel's love of a man with so many defects, she replied that no doubt she had always seen his faults—for love, is not, as people thought, the blind god, but the most clear-sighted one—but that such a perception had nothing to do with love.

It was true that she had tried to "dissect this love, so that it might never come to life again." But she had not the strength to do it, for she was seized by "the new European love" in all its fateful might.

"I believe that if the director of this earth had wished to give an example of this kind of love in all its transformations and possibilities, in its highest power, genuineness, and purity, combined with the highest self-knowledge and thus in the highest degree conscious of its own torments, so as to reflect every pain from the whole compass of the soul, as though it were furnished with facets,—I believe that I should have sufficed for this."

She is still without an answer to her own question, why it should have been this man of all others who for the first and only time in her life made her feel "that fever of love, that perfect satisfaction in the contemplation of his person."

"This person, this being has exercised the greatest magic over me, and *consequently* exercises it still. To him I gave . . . my whole heart, and this can only be given back by love and worthiness, otherwise one never gets it again. Is there then a magic of curses? Can one devote one's self to a devil? When he left the room I fell down with a loud cry, my heart bursting against my ribs, and asked God whether one can

make away with one's heart, for he knew that without a heart one can live no longer.

". . . It seems as though he must leave me something that he has of me, and as though his love could still kindle and *heal* me. . . . Until I can love some one more deeply . . . I am deprived of the part of me that is necessary to my happiness, the source of my brightest, most intimate being is buried under heavy curses and *magic.*"

"Ah, eternal fate, thou wilt remain true, so long as the smallest fibre is left of me. True thou wilt ever have been! True! True were the eternal things I eternally wrote to the unfeeling one . . . true that I found the symbol of my senses; that I threw away my heart to him for ever; true that he did not understand me; true the frightful dissonance. How few love! Of whole generations only one. . ."

"Oh, what a disease is love! How much caprice, how much folly there is in it. . . . And *this* is our real love—*not the first*—wherein not a speck of us remains behind, wherein we honestly give the last drop of our blood. It only remains to suffer honestly."

Rahel's confessions of Urquijo's continued power over her, here quoted and in part addressed to Varnhagen, have an interesting parallel in a letter which Mme. de Staël, then married to Rocca, wrote to Benjamin Constant; a letter in which she indirectly tells him that so long as her heart beats, he will have a place in that heart which no one else has had or can have.

That a certain voice, a certain smile, a certain look, a certain temperament above all other beings, near or far, can force the one who loves them to remain within their magic circle, even when that magic circle is a circle of hell—that is the enigma. And Rahel pondered over it as long as she lived.

But pondering may make the hair white without bringing a spark of light into the irrationality of love's nature. Nor did Rahel gain from all her brooding over the fate of her love any knowledge but this: "I know the disease, I have enjoyed it."

In 1807 she still felt, not "*as one wounded, but as one destroyed,*" and knew that she could never "grow together." But she was "not dead to contact with the world," although she no longer possessed that point of the soul "to which life flows." Yet by degrees she felt that she was alive, capable of enjoyment and amusement; indeed, she says that she had grafted on her heart many a liking that she had no name for. She begins to feel "calmness, broadness of vision, and joy" through contemplation of herself. By degrees new growth has sprung up in the desert she calls her heart; she has begun to find out that "there is a clearness and happiness in and through

ourselves"; that a heart full of "maltreated love" may return to itself, to "its own inner country." Indeed, she feels that "so long as one lives, one loves, when one has once loved. And this affliction is moreover one of the best. I do not resist my heart: therein lies my art."

Rahel was not one of those poor, inert, and self-centred natures that insist upon sorrowing, that tear open their wounds as soon as they begin to close.

A woman who in spite of all her sufferings preserves her vivacity, who has "a gay spirit but a sad heart," usually exercises a great attraction upon youth. And just at this time Rahel gained a new intimate in a young man who, like David Veit, remained only a friend, but was a friend in the fullest sense of the word. To him, as to Veit, many of Rahel's most significant letters were written.

This young man was Alexander von Marwitz, belonging to a noble family whose estate was near Berlin. He was twenty-two when he made Rahel's acquaintance in 1809, and had lately abandoned a military career, which was not to his taste, in order to live on his estate as an agriculturist

and scholar. But, like most young men of a serious turn of mind at his age, he was rendered unhappy by the gulf between his ideal will and the reality by which he was surrounded, between his eager young powers and the insignificant aims to which he could direct them. And his melancholy took the form of thoughts of suicide.

In this gloom he found help in Rahel, of whom he wrote in his admiring gratitude: "She must surely be the greatest woman now on earth."

She helped him not only with sympathy in his suffering, but by letting him feel that he was necessary to her. She taught him that natures "with the double gifts, the twofold spirit" must learn to bear solitude and find their consolation in working for others, for the life of one who does nothing but complain is a miserable one. No doubt it was true that the time offered no opportunity for a great achievement, but it remained for all "to do well what lay nearest."

"You cannot escape the age. Every one is bound to his time. Our time is that of consciousness, mirroring itself to infinity, even to vertigo. . . ."

"To live, love, study, be diligent, marry, if it so turns out, to perform every trifling act properly and with life, that is in any case to have lived. . . ."

But in order to impart this understanding and this

advice, Rahel herself had had to gain the wisdom she compresses into such words as these:

"The hardened heart, the soul prepared for everything, which has nothing left but its own conscience, can await its fate from this inmost point of being, relying on itself."

"There is a universe, in it we develop. And it matters not at all what fate is ours, when we have arrived at the perception that development *is* our fate."

What is here quoted shows how Rahel healed her own wounds. And to help her friend to perceive that a human being can bear greater pain than his own youthful *Weltschmerz*, she did not shrink from revealing to him her deepest sufferings.

She was really successful in saving her friend, of whom she says that his presence had become to her "what the eye is to the world," so much consolation and joy had he brought her during a companionship, the nature of which she thus characterised: "We live like two students, one of whom is a woman."

And it was not as a suicide but as a hero, in the struggle for liberty of 1813, that Marwitz ended his life.

3

While Rahel was thus helping others she was

still herself a sufferer. After the great volcanic eruption she wrote: "There will always be a Herculaneum to explore."

She was still buried in the ruins when she heard outside her grave a young voice sing an alluring song of new life.

It was during the agitated period of Rahel's relations with Urquijo that Varnhagen saw her for the first time at a house in Berlin, where he was tutor. He regarded the celebrated Rahel with interest, but at a distance; probably she hardly noticed the youth of eighteen, otherwise than as a member of the group of literary young men to which her brother Leopold belonged.

Varnhagen von Ense was born at Düsseldorf on February 21, 1785. His father was a medical man, and at his death the fifteen-year-old boy determined to follow the same profession. But lack of means delayed his studies, and before they were finished he had changed his plans more than once.

His second post as tutor was at Hamburg. And there he fell in love with the mother of his pupils, Fanny Herz, a widow and several years his senior. As she returned his inclination, it led to a secret

engagement. This lasted during the years of his studentship, so that he was still engaged to Fanny Herz when in 1807 he met Rahel for the second time, again in her circle of acquaintance in Berlin. She at once made a powerful impression on him, and his presentiment of her unique excellence became certainty when he saw the unqualified admiration, nay, reverence, with which his great teacher Schleiermacher treated Rahel. Varnhagen afterwards saw her at Fichte's lectures. But it was not until the spring of 1808 that he ventured one day to approach Rahel in the course of a walk and to enter into a conversation, in which he succeeded in interesting her so much that she asked him to call.

Rahel, who was then thirty-seven, at first looked upon the twenty-three-year-old Varnhagen as a young man whom, like Marwitz, she could assist in the battle of life. But she soon found that her experience with Bokelmann was repeated, and that a soulful youth gave his enthusiasm the name of love. And, as before, she regarded this erotically-tinted enthusiasm as a transient emotion and at first could only herself feel that calm sort of love which consisted in joy over the youth himself and gratitude for his sympathy.

But the result was different and Varnhagen acquired an importance in her life which surpassed that of Bokelmann as much as Urquijo's importance surpassed that of Finckenstein.

Varnhagen was one of those men, rare then as now, to whom the element of soul in love outweighs, or at least counterbalances, that of the senses; to whom psychological interest is the strongest intellectual passion, and in whom mental receptivity is greater than creative power. Goethe calls Varnhagen a "separating, searching, discriminating, and criticising nature," and this description covers a whole class. It is in general men of this type who form the little group just mentioned—those who love the feminine *personality*. Exceptions may no doubt be found, above all, Goethe. But as a general rule men who are full of their own force are not transported in their whole being by the feminine life of the soul and feminine qualities. A man who is powerfully creative and sunk in his own world does not often afford the woman he loves the happiness of feeling herself understood and appreciated in her most personal qualities; to him she is always the sexual creature. The unproductive,

or but slightly productive observer more frequently proves an eager listener to a woman's soul, more delicately responsive, more rapidly vibrating. Such men often have many women friends and, if their outward appearance is not unmanly, they also inspire profound erotic feelings. The feminine life of the soul has for them the same attraction as the physical woman for the masculine majority; for they are provided with a new sense; a sense of the woman-soul. Often it is men of just this kind who in youth do not feel attracted by young girls. To their own refined sensitiveness, their intellectual maturity, their passion for culture, above all culture of the soul, their interest in psychological inquiry, young girls appear too undeveloped or indeterminate or insignificant. And this is even more the case since, before the age of twenty, and often even longer, the most soulful young women conceal the individuality they are forming as shyly as certain buds conceal their colour until the flower is fully open. In women of a maturer age, on the other hand, the young men we are speaking of find more readily the completed personal character, the complicated life of the soul, intensified by experience, the refinement of sensation, the many-

sided culture, which to them form the greatest attraction in a feminine being. And since women in our time, owing to the richer, freer life they are able to lead, preserve both their outward and inward youthfulness better than formerly, love affairs and marriages between men of this type, but also of other types, and women older than themselves are becoming more and more usual.

No sign of the times is more significant of the evolution of man's love than this. For this love has then, in most cases, run the same course as that of the soulful woman; it has first kindled the soul, and the flame of the soul has kindled the senses.

No doubt it happens not unfrequently that such a man is seized in his maturer years with love for a young woman. From the point of view of the race this is even desirable, and sometimes, perhaps, the older woman is prepared to have to repay, by a final renunciation, the second springtime her life has received. In any case, connections of this kind between younger men and older women often assist in a high degree the development of both. Nietzsche went so far as to recommend them. They are only "unnatural,"

as the thoughtless call them, when the woman retains the man, either by the brute force of the law or by the more delicate means her grief can command. So long as coercive marriage exists—and until human beings have reached that stage of development when they will no more retain with them a loved one with the corpse of his love within him, than they would keep his dead body itself—so long will unions between men and women, where the difference in age is great, be nevertheless frequently unnatural, not in their early, but in their later stages. But in our time we see more and more often an enduring happiness achieved either by an older woman and a younger man or the reverse, when these persons possess a true sense of responsibility with regard to the success of their life's experiment and a true perception of the means whereby love may be kept alive.

In these, as in so many other respects, Rahel was far ahead of her time. She understood from the very beginning that perfect mutual freedom and frankness are the only ties that bind.

Perhaps the greatest power over women of the men just described lies in their boundless need of

women. These Don Juans of the soul are not wholly captured, as Rahel said of Varnhagen later, by any particular woman; but the whole female sex captures them all the more irresistibly. Everywhere they find women to whom they can confess their adventures, complain of their sufferings; who console them when their sensitiveness is wounded, support them when their self-confidence fails. Woman is the mirror in which their self-contemplation shows them their own image magnified, or the oil their working-machinery cannot dispense with.

And this is confirmed in Varnhagen's relations to Rahel. He met her at the time when, in addition to the wide and gracious receptivity of his own nature, he also had that of youth; when his many-sided culture and intellectual maturity were far in advance of his years, while his personality was still a chaos of mutually conflicting propensities, desires, and feelings. In the matter of a career, no less than in that of his view of life and his love, he was seeking that which accorded with his true nature. And now through Rahel he felt himself "as though raised at a stroke to a higher plane of life." He was confronted by a nature that was the opposite of his own; a nature as pro-

nounced as it was complete in its individuality. This nature was, moreover, that of a woman, a woman whose perfect frankness permitted him to look into the depths of her soul and whose boundless generosity could only be compared with her inexhaustible wealth.

Varnhagen thus describes his first impression of Rahel: "A slight, graceful figure, small, but strongly built, with strikingly small hands and feet. Her face, surrounded by a wealth of black hair, gave evidence of intellectual superiority; the rapid, but firm glances of her dark eyes left one in doubt whether they gave or received more; an expression of suffering lent a gentle charm to the clear features. She moved almost like a shadow in her dark dress, but freely and firmly, and her greeting was as unconstrained as it was friendly. But what surprised me most was her voice, sonorous, soft, sounding from the inmost soul, and the most wonderful speech I have ever heard. In easy unpretending sentences, of the most original humour and turn of mind, were united naïveté and wit, severity and amiability, and all this was infused with a deep veracity, hard as iron, so that even the strongest felt at once that it would not be easy to twist or break anything in her utterances. At the same time a beneficent warmth of human kindness and sympathy allowed even the humblest to rejoice in her presence."

And Varnhagen describes their early intercourse thus: "Infinitely charming and fruitful was this springtime of an enchanting companionship, to which

I too contributed the best I had. . . . Our confidential intimacy increased day by day. . . . Far from meeting with approval in everything, I was often blamed, and could guess at further displeasure which was left unspoken; yet I could feel that her sympathy for me did not suffer thereby, but rather increased, and this gain prevented me from taking the rest to heart. . . . It was vouchsafed to me to look into the richest life. . . . "

. . . "This life appeared indestructibly young and strong, not only as regards the mighty spirit that soared freely above the waves of daily life, but also as to the heart, the senses, the veins, the whole bodily existence, which was all immersed in freshness and brightness; and the purest, most refreshing present stood between a perfected past and a future rich in hope."

There was nothing irresistible in Varnhagen's exterior. He was tall and fair, with wavy hair about a lofty, intelligent forehead; blue-gray, observant, but yet gentle eyes; a delicate nose with sensitive nostrils; a still more delicate and sensitive mouth. His whole appearance was agreeable without being out of the common; the weakness that the face exhibits in later years was probably even more apparent in youth. Such as he was, he exercised no fascination upon Rahel. She herself has said that her wounded and outraged heart had no strength to love alone; that it

was his love that won her; that she was ashamed so long as he loved alone, but when she saw that he really loved, that he had found the inmost continuity of her being, then she on her side did not restrain her heart. But, she continues, her feeling was now not only gratitude for his gifts but emotion at his love. This would have been repugnant to her, if she had not also discovered his "love-charm"; if her heart's highest flame had not united with his. Rahel's last love is a confirmation of the Danish poet Paludan-Müller's words: that our heart is like the violin, which, once broken, gives a better tone but a weaker sound.

She had, of course, twice encountered love. But the first time it had not been so strong that the jealousy and prejudice of petty feminine souls could not conquer it; nor was it so fiery the second time that her lover's own jealousy and prejudice could not quench it. She had, of course, had many friends. But these had sought her on their own account, because they needed consolation or strength or stimulation. In a word, she had either been loved without being understood, or understood without being loved; sought after and delighted in like a great and rare phenomenon. But no one had ever surrounded her with the feel-

ing that delivers us from loneliness, that is a loving comprehension of what is unique and individual in our soul. In her deepest sorrow Rahel had learned that people understand each other so little that they do not even hear the wailing "that bursts forth from the breast of each," or, if we hear it, we cannot help even those we love the best, whom we wholly understand, and whose sufferings torture us.

. . . "We are lonely. This cell, in which every human soul is held and where love *now and then* marries life to life, this is what makes us grow stiff."

But of all the manifestations of Rahel's feeling of loneliness, none is more significant than the fact that she, who "was a disciple of Shakespeare," was early and often occupied with thoughts of death. But never had her own death moved her; never had she thought that her death "would hurt a single person. From you," she wrote to Varnhagen, "I learned it; and it was for the first time in my life that I thought it and knew that I had thought it. So lonely have I lived."

Varnhagen, the born student of human nature, not only observed Rahel with the most eager interest, but absorbed her with the most implicit

devotion. With a knowledge of self extraordinary for his years, he was aware of his own fundamental defect: "My spirit came quite poor into the world . . . no spring wells up in me. . . . I am empty." But with equal clearness he perceives his chief qualities: receptivity, intelligent and profound assimilation of the thing received, strength to admire, and strength to wait.

"I am a slender thread by the side of your beautiful, tall tree, I know it. And I almost despair at my want of strength, which is thus placed by love beside your bubbling, strong-flowing life; I feel my poverty in every sense through your richness. . . ."

"But in this complete emptiness I always remain open: a ray of sunshine, a movement, a form of beauty or merely of strength never escapes me; I simply wait for something to happen, like a beggar by the roadside. . . ."

"You traverse every sphere, whilst I move only in a few. . . . But when you visit mine, you will always find me, and if you enter a house where I cannot follow, I shall wait quietly by the door. . . ."

The last-named quality is the rarest of all, among people in general and young people in particular. It depends upon the power of losing one's self so completely in the person one loves that one can wait with absolute confidence the

unravelling through that person herself of whatever may seem unreasonable, unjust, or incomprehensible in her. And Rahel caused Varnhagen, as he did her, not a few difficulties, especially by her unqualified frankness. It is characteristic of this that several of her already quoted confidences on the subject of her feeling for Urquijo were made to Varnhagen, between 1808 and 1812, and equally characteristic that she often directed her penetrating criticism against Varnhagen himself. But his belief in Rahel stood every test.

Rahel, who felt too exhausted by suffering to believe in the possibility of a personal happiness, awoke day after day with growing wonder and emotion at this new thing that had come to her.

During the summer of 1808, she lived at Charlottenburg, which was then rural. Varnhagen went there every afternoon to exchange ideas and experiences, while they walked in the cool, flower-scented park, or beneath the avenues and along the bank of the Spree, or on the shady green before the house. The moon rose, the stars came out, but their conversation continued, with or without words. And Rahel felt the atmosphere about her transformed by this intimate under-

standing, which every soulful person dreams of, seeks in friendship and love, and hardly ever finds. But when we have found it, there is no more need of disguises or masks, protective armour or weapons of defence. Then we are transported to Paradise, where the air is always mild, nakedness always natural, weapons always needless, for there we move like a happy child in the warmth of loving eyes. The richer, the more complicated a person's nature is, the more difficult is it for him to find this all-loving comprehension. But if he finds it, it will transform existence as the spirit of a walk is transformed, when we leave the hot, dusty highway and turn into the mossy, sun-flecked, perfumed woods; as the atmosphere is transformed when a leaden sky is cleft and a flood of sunlight is poured over the earth; as the landscape is transformed when, at a sudden turn of the road, we leave the Alps behind us and see Italy at our feet, in the season of vines and roses.

He who has experienced this, if only for a day, can divine what Rahel felt, when she first heard steps approaching "the calm, unvisited lake in the depths of the soul," when she no longer felt herself lonely, when by degrees she was filled by the sunshine of all-embracing, all-penetrating sympa-

thy, when she encountered a longing that desired her being in all its transitions, with all its anomalies and mutability. Rahel speaks of their companionship, "our dear, gay, childish, happy intercourse, our running, eating, enjoying the air and hunting for pleasure; our unassuming existence without plan or aim . . ."; and what she lays stress on as the best of all was that it never occurred to them "to try to imagine anything."

Before she had found Varnhagen she wrote: "I know excellent people. And they are friendly towards me and like to see me as they would look upon a rock, a mass of clouds, a stormy sea or the like. *None of them harbours the human being in me*, with whom, however, they all seek shelter."

. . . "You are the only one in the whole world who has ever been fond of me, who has treated me as I treat others. Yes, I gladly confess this to you with all the impulse of gratitude: of you I have learned to be loved, and you have created something new in me. It is not vanity, . . . that continually penetrates my being with satisfaction, that you must know—you, whose right understanding of me forces the tears to my eyes—it is at last the healthy, strong, true, real conception of the soul. *It takes and gives*, and so a true life is born to me! Rejoice, if you really value me and look upon my life and being as something out of the ordinary: you have put the stamp of humanity on it."

"What I love in you is, that you appreciate my

nature and that your appreciation reveals itself, acts and expresses itself as it does. I return your love with extreme affection, as you have seen a hundred times. . . ."

And later: "Only one in the whole world recognises my claim to be a personality, and does not wish merely to use and swallow up some part or other of me; loves me as nature created me and fate distorted me; understands this fate; is willing to leave me the remainder of my life, and to gladden it and draw it nearer to heaven; and, for the happiness of being my friend, will be, do, and leave all for me. This is the man who is called my bridegroom."

Varnhagen describes his impression of that summer in the words: "I feel as if I had spent the summer in Athens." In Rahel's conversation he had found the loftiest speculation, "as this must take form in life, the inmost marrow of philosophy," and he felt that he came from her with liberated powers, with "a newly-illuminated nature"; that she had revealed to him what was deepest and best in himself. "Your influence flows in me unbrokenly, in a thousand streams," he wrote.

But just as Rahel had emptied the urn that contained the ashes of the past and again approached the altar, whence she might take new fire, just as she had carried her heart, as one carries a child after a winter's illness, out into the green grass

of May, the "passionate suspense" that she had feared began to be felt in this relationship, as in the others. She, who thought she had done with life and expected nothing from it but "a little sunshine, fresh air, and green leaves" and who could thus look forward "cheerfully and without constraint" to the morrow, now felt that the day was no longer her own: "This godlike feeling, my only happiness, is mine no more." And the reason was that Varnhagen, on account of his awakening love, his desire of winning hers, his fear of being unworthy of her, his continued feeling for the lady he was engaged to, and his connection with her, was so unbalanced that she felt him to be hostile to her and their intercourse to be "strangely jarring and painful."

"You treat me like a mine: with pick-axes, crowbars, and tools you try to get something out of me that I withhold, you try to remove the slag, crush, burn, break up, and thus purify it for your use! But supposing it were otherwise, and you were crushing a plant? . . ."

"I feel oppressed and anxious at having to perform something, ashamed and vexed at not being able to do it. . . ."

And so this pain broke in upon Rahel, that she had allowed her sleeping heart to wake, only to

see it killed anew; that she had hardly begun to feel that Varnhagen had become indispensable to her, before she was faced by the possibility of losing him. And the danger of this was twofold: it came from her own past and from his. For Rahel did not conceal from him that neither he nor any one else could evoke a passion such as Urquijo had inspired in her, and she made it clear to him that any claims in this direction would only disturb the beauty of the new feeling that was growing up between them. She lets him read all her letters to Urquijo, although she feels that perhaps this will part them. But in giving him the letters she warns Varnhagen against being too ready to let her go. For in her he would lose a world; nowhere would he find any one with whom life would be easier and more manifold, inmost fidelity more sincere, security and harmony greater. For it was true that she was "nothing in any particular direction, but she knew, as surely as one knows of one's own existence, that the good in her was unique." And not only that, but she knew that her sentiment for Varnhagen was growing, that the pain of losing him would be greater than all that had gone before. But this does not prevent Rahel, when he begins to speak of his continued

feeling for Fanny Herz, of the intimate letters he was still writing to her, of her waiting for him, of his sorrow for her suffering, from acting in full concord with her principles, since these were one with her nature. In her bitter grief at having once more come pure and honest and being obliged to go away "poor and injured," the thought no doubt flashed through her that this time she would not give way, that she would hold her own against this woman who was her inferior. But Rahel, pure and serious as a flame, soon gave up this idea. Varnhagen, with his lamentations over the perplexity to which he could see no issue, in which he could choose neither Rahel nor Fanny, seemed to her an object of pity rather than of scorn. Perhaps he was right in saying that he was a "hyper-modern" person, that he could really love two women at the same time, that he required many love affairs as he required many friends. He was one of the "distintegrated moderns, the sick Europeans" and he had to follow his nature, as Rahel hers. She acknowledges that with her extremely explosive nature she could no doubt be hasty, abrupt, unjust, but "how should one persecuted by God be amiable?" In spite of the shipwreck that had stranded her in the region the

ancients called hell, she had yet had courage to venture once more upon the same ocean. And she felt that this very courage, the strength of her poor, lonely, ill-treated heart to love again, made her a very wonderful being and that her own power of giving much involved her right to make great claims. Not of fidelity. It is true that she calls love and fidelity one and the same, but she immediately explains that this does not mean that a so-called love cannot come to an end. This is just what shows it to have been an illusion.

"Our senses then claim something better, and our heart has not been touched, nor has it affected the rest of our soul. . . . That which we retrieve for ourselves is no fidelity, but that is fidelity which resides securely deep in our heart together with our blood. . . ."

She knows that she herself is one of those who can do nothing else but love, for whom love is their "masterpiece, their crown, their life, and their proof of authenticity." He would not be able to tear fidelity out of her heart without tearing her heart itself to pieces, without turning all its blood to tears and without transforming himself so that she lost her faith in him! Varnhagen had given her happiness, and whether

this was to be lasting or not made no difference to its reality. If his happiness was still with her, then she would be mad with bliss, but without *his* happiness, his presence could give her no joy. And finally she exclaims: "Oh, understand me! If I could hold your head and kiss you, you would understand me."

What she asks is only that he shall make his choice. For, in spite of Rahel's certainty that "where two hearts beat as one, there is seriousness"; in spite of her knowledge that "the inmost heart is wiser than all else," it was possible that she was mistaken and that Varnhagen's fiancée was his "real life-pulse." And therefore Rahel felt but one duty: that of giving Varnhagen his full freedom and insisting on his going to Hamburg and putting his feelings to the test by a renewed companionship with Fanny Herz. She only gave him one piece of advice characteristic of herself: "Have no conscience!"

Neither his sympathy with Rahel's nor with Fanny's suffering ought to have any influence with him, but only considerations of what he perceived to be his true happiness.

"*You must be free*, and you are free. You are bound by no word to me, no utterance, no hope you have

given. . . . Your longing, your love for me alone can make me happy; a bond that holds you, never,never! With me you are like a bird on its branch. . . ."

"You must see her, this woman, must live with her. If there are wounds, they must be perfectly healed: either by a happy life together or by sheer separation. I would rather not see you again first. Every night I grow stronger, firmer, purer, more resolute, more self-penetrating; I can bear nothing weak, wounded, ambiguous, sick, or pitiful in my soul. . . ."

"If you love me, all will come right. I can no longer struggle with or for anything, and a conquered happiness has always disgusted me. . . ."

"You think me hard? I *am*, unhappy woman! And always towards myself! I would not show you two suffering women and so showed you *one hard as iron*. Even now, when you must leave me, I will not complain. If you come, I shall be glad. I am not fond of hesitation: that is the limit of *my* nature."

She can face without any rage of jealousy the possibility of losing him, but only if he thereby attains a greater happiness. For a feeling that is quenched, for a false idea of duty, she will not allow herself to be sacrificed. If he leaves her, she and the happiness he has given her will remain hers for ever.

"You are to enjoy love and happiness and brightness. . . . This is no exaggerated, sentimental, self-sacrifice on my part. I set no value on divid-

ing and sacrificing. But if you really loved, I would help to crown you! . . ."

"I return your love with extreme affection, as you have seen a hundred times; I could spend my life with you, that is my ardent and serious, now my *only* desire; I should devote it to you with joy and the greatest satisfaction; I recognise your whole value, and not a grain of your amiability, accurately weighed, escapes me. I am faithful to you from inclination, from love, and from the best-considered choice. I have no claims upon you. I am your friend, as a man might be. You are in no respect bound by me. I should wish to serve you with my blood. And is it not natural that at last I should wish to be acknowledged? and it is only through you that I am acknowledged clearly. . . . But do not think that I love you entirely without anxiety. The possession of you is necessary to me in every sense. But where satisfaction *has been*, there it remains. And in every loss, in every need, it would always give me support. I have possessed life's happiness."

She makes no pretence of heroism, she openly expresses the feeling of loss that prevents her enjoying nature, light and shade, all that they have enjoyed together, as though she wished to communicate to him every word, every gleam of sunshine that delights her. She tells him that simply by coming into her life he has become "a gleam of sunlight over the whole horizon of the life she has

yet to live"; he has given her a sense of health, pride, satisfaction; she feels that the magic circle of her fate has been broken and now she has courage to lose him and live on. If it is right for him to leave her, then he should do so; then she would lose him as inevitably as the flower falls from the tree and the tree is nevertheless able to endure the winter.

"Ought I to murder myself in advance, because I am mortal?. . . . It is stupid to be afraid; is not the present moment also future? We always want the future to be so beautiful, so certain!"

There is no period of Rahel's life which throws clearer light on her nature than this. An ordinary selfish woman, in the given circumstances, would have done everything to keep Varnhagen in Berlin and with alternate coolness and warmth would have aroused his jealousy and his passion. An ordinary unselfish woman, in the given circumstances, would have sacrificed herself to his so-called "duty" to his fiancée.

Rahel does neither. She sends him to Hamburg, but keeps, through her letters and the frank expression of her feelings, the power she has won; his presence there gives his fiancée the

same chance, and his fate is to be decided by the sacrifice of neither, but only by his own choice.

She said herself that she awaited the crisis as one awaits that of a fever; but until he had decided, one way or the other, she would not see him again.

At Hamburg, Varnhagen found that his feeling for Fanny grew fainter day by day; that their misunderstandings increased; that, even if there had been no Rahel, their relationship could never be resumed, and he had definitely broken it off when he returned to Rahel.

But now new difficulties appeared, due to Varnhagen's possessing neither fortune nor position and to his being both unable and unwilling to unite Rahel's lot with his, until he was something more than a student, whose studies even were not concluded. Rahel agreed with him in this, and thus during their engagement they remained separated, except for brief periods, while Varnhagen, as student, soldier, and diplomatist, completed his education and established his position, so that he might be able to offer Rahel something more than his devoted soul.

During these years of uncertainty and separation Rahel applied more and more perfectly her great principle of married life: "Be true and

grow gentle"; the principle which she has also formulated at greater length in these words:

"See, love, understand, wish for nothing, adapt one's self, even when not in fault; reverence the greatness of existence, do not harass, invent, and improve and be cheerful and ever more kind!"

This was not always easy during the six years of Varnhagen's Odyssey, for his indecision, lack of method, and uncertainty caused Rahel not only sorrow, by failure of arrangements for meeting, for instance, but also practical difficulties and personal unpleasantness. She on her side has the tender sensitiveness of one who has twice been mortally wounded. She prefers to withdraw rather than constantly to renew her sufferings, and she is so afraid of binding or hindering him that a man with less psychological insight than Varnhagen would have thought her cold.

It is very significant that she never feels the difference in their ages as a hindrance. For on the one hand she looked for a long time younger than he did, on the other she felt with one of her friends that between lovers "*les âmes sont toujours du même âge.*" What she feared was that she had suffered too much, that she no longer had elasticity, courage, confidence enough for happiness.

And what she knew was that she was no longer capable of only giving, making no demands.

"I have atoned sufficiently here on earth, with my whole earthly life, for the lie that I did not claim what I desired and gave."

No doubt Rahel is sometimes over-hasty in her censure, but she willingly acknowledges her injustice and Varnhagen makes this easy for her by the touching amiability with which he receives her strictures, even when they are undeserved. He felt that in a broad sense she was right in drawing his attention to what she called his "life-pauses": the instances of rudeness or indelicacy or hastiness whereby he made enemies; and when she blamed his "everlasting habit of pouring himself out" to every one he met, his weakly need of sympathy and his want of independence.

His lack of fixity and repose was due in great measure to the conditions of the time. But they often cause Rahel to wonder whether the earth only existed for her to "weep, be enraptured, and love" in, but never to strike root in.

Since Varnhagen, also a disciple of Goethe, understood the word culture in its deepest sense—as the education which penetrates and transforms

the whole man—he was capable of loving Rahel's unsparing frankness, even when she pointed out the unfertile fields in his own nature, which he ought to cultivate. Nothing is more descriptive of Rahel's feeling during the first years of their engagement than the following beautiful words: "Ah, how I rejoice over your development! Dear chalice, what wilt thou not contain, warmed at my breast, by my love! I am so happy and so proud and so uneasy. My spirit and my heart have a child! This child is my beloved!" And in truth she was to him mother and sister, friend and mistress; she exhaled genius and goodness upon him; her devotion was as clear-sighted and wise as it was tender and active.

Her feeling is genuine and warm even in all the little things by which she shows how he is always present to her; as, for instance when she has eaten something that he would have liked, or enjoyed the air, or taken a pleasant walk. And she is delighted when similar things appear in his letters. Thus he once had a hard wooden bench to sleep on at night, and thought: "If Rahel knew of this!" These words were enough to illumine her soul, "like summer lightning," with bright happiness. For they "were a witness of intimate, confiding, de-

voted love, and knowledge of being loved again. If she had been there, how she would have kissed him on the hard bench; how she would have made it comfortable for him, for he would have had her shoulder to lean against. . . ."

In many ways Rahel shows that she does not love him "without uneasiness," and on his expressing some doubt she exclaims: "Have you then never seen the transport in my eyes, when I looked into yours? The stifling stream of blissfulness that then came over me?"

It is true that she is still "inaccessible" in her soul and sees that "every one carries about with him this patrimony from other worlds." She knew that even love cannot penetrate into the doubts of the soul, the questionings of conscience, or the depths of memory. But otherwise she felt the glow of love through her whole being, and she could say with truth to Varnhagen: "You have won my feeling, my whole heart." Indeed, without her love she seems to herself shadowy and of no account; on the days when she has not written to him she has not lived at all, and "to kiss his mouth, his eyes, to press him to her heart" is her most ardent longing. Varnhagen on his side shows in a thousand ways the truth of his words: "I love

you so boundlessly and intensely, as neither lovers nor friends are loved: as your disciple and prophet." He wonders whether she can suffer so much as he from their separation, since she has—Rahel, for whom he is always longing! He hungers for every line of hers and asks her to let him see what she writes even to others, for he covets her slightest words, whether they reveal the depth, the nobility, or the gaiety of her temperament, of which he confirms Jean Paul's judgment, that great as were Rahel's wisdom and wit, they were yet of less importance than her warmth and goodness. "With you," says Varnhagen, "even the commonplace becomes uncommon, through the genuineness that radiates from your every manifestation of life." And he hit upon one among his many happy expressions for Rahel's personality—its firmness, unity, its perfectly-rounded completeness—when he said that she ought properly to be represented plastically. He tells her that, when her letters arrive, he first lets them lie before him unopened for a little while. For the letter bears with it a ray of her presence, and to see it and touch it in its outer form gives him a little of that bliss he felt when he could look into her eyes and kiss her lips. And in the same way

Varnhagen expresses most perfectly his own feeling for Rahel's nature when he says that she is to him what the Bible is to Christians; the thought of her follows him everywhere, it is the light of his life and embraces the whole circle of his knowledge, his joys, and his sorrows. She, the ever healthy and creative, sows the fields of his soul with her living words; each one of them shoots up within him and becomes a full ear, from which he derives his sustenance. He rejoices that, when their letters cross, it often happens that they contain the same thought, written down by each independently of the other; for in this he sees to what a degree they belong to each other, how they delight in the same things, as they also understand jest and earnest in the same way.

And, he writes, like the jet of a fountain the desire continually rises within him of seeing everything with her, hearing her speak of everything, seeing her life sink into everything and come forth again in full flower. "You are so rich," he says, "that twenty such as I would be needed only to form a pair of eyes as seeing as yours, and in my whole head there is not so much life as in your little finger!" By all roads his thoughts, dreams,

and plans arrive at her, whose mere existence is to him a festival of triumph.

"That my life was able to win you and has won you, makes it in my eyes one of the most favoured that has ever been lived upon earth," says Varnhagen.

But we may reverse the saying and put it that only a rare nature *could* have won Rahel, and there is no surer evidence of the worth of what was *essential* in Varnhagen's nature than the fact that he before all others understood Rahel with the perfect comprehension of love. With his weaknesses in public life we have nothing to do here. In one thing he was great: his great love. To have been capable of such an emotion is a man's patent of nobility, his eternal life. Every one who reads with seeing eyes the correspondence between Varnhagen and Rahel knows, too, that it is always the sun of genuine love that shines upon Rahel's existence, though at a different season. It was no longer spring, as with her feeling for Finckenstein, nor high summer, as with Urquijo, but September, the season when cold and poverty have not yet appeared, when the heat is gone but the warmth remains, when the air is cool and soft as silk, the sky deep blue and the sunshine more

golden than ever, when the gardens are brilliant with richly-coloured flowers and ripening fruit falls upon the dewy grass, when peace and plenty are united as at no other season.

And Rahel expressed this peace and plenty in love by the simplest, and greatest, of all words of love: "With you near me I could part from life, freed from pain."

The more intimately their souls were united, the more keenly did Varnhagen feel his daily loss in being separated from Rahel, for the fervid spontaneity of whose companionship no letters could make amends. At last the time arrived when, in Rahel's words, they could have their love forged "on the plebeian anvil," as a condition of "being allowed to pass by the plebeians." Varnhagen, like Rahel, thought it a miserable thing that society should be "such a poor-house that it has only this one form for the most widely diversified relationship," and they both submit to the form with the reservation that they are to "ignore" the fact of their being married. Rahel insists both before and after her marriage that, if Varnhagen had not understood her "indescribable yearning

for liberty," if with him she had not been able to be true in everything, if his ideas of the absurdity of marriage had not been exactly the same as hers, she would never have married him.

They were married as quietly as possible on September 27, 1814, and shortly afterwards were again separated, owing to Varnhagen's political duties. The first five years of their married life were spent partly in Vienna, partly in Carlsruhe and elsewhere; a restless life, during which Rahel longed more and more to return to Berlin. This only became possible in October, 1819. But from that time until her death she was never absent except for very brief periods from the place that she loved, since she had "suffered, loved, and known" so much there. During the many periods of separation incidental to these first years of their married life, Varnhagen's letters are even more ardent than before their union. More and more during his life with Rahel does he discover her "uniqueness"; she alone is in the fullest sense good, inspired, beautiful, and true, and through the "waves of love and life" she sends over him, she is "the author of his happiness." And she exclaims that it is "a happiness to which one ought to kneel" to receive such love-letters from one's

husband; they make her humble and uneasy that she is not handsome enough, so that others perhaps may blame Varnhagen's choice, but glad that she looks so young. Otherwise this would have displeased her, for she preferred that age and looks should keep pace. It is a source of wonder as well as of happiness to her that Varnhagen, "through some magic unknown to her," is in love with her.

"I am so greatly loved and honoured by him that I am ashamed before God and must constantly reflect how I may be able to sweeten his life, so as to repay him at least in part. But my greatest happiness consists in this, that I am *entirely* unconscious of being married! That I am perfectly free in *all* things, in my life and feeling; that I can tell Varnhagen everything, can be *entirely* true, and that just this so delights and charms him. But he too is happy through me, only through me. You ought to see and hear how he expresses this in my presence and in writing to me. When we see such things in books, we do not believe them and say: This is only fiction."

"I am on a perfectly free footing with him, otherwise I could never have married him. His ideas of marriage and mine are the same. . . ."

"I acknowledge no relationship to be free and beautiful if it restricts me, if it makes me lie or deny my nature what is possible and necessary to it."

And to Varnhagen she wrote: "As far as it was *possible*—possible to your nature—to understand a nature such as mine, you have understood me: through

the noblest and most soulful recognition: with an insight that I do not *understand*, since it is not due to resemblances in our natures. It is impossible for any person to adopt and deal with another more unselfishly, more magnanimously, with more understanding than you have done with me. Never has insight into a person taken such effect upon the very centre of the will as your insight into me. This cannot be more warmly acknowledged than by me, nor can this acknowledgment be more completely transformed into love."

It is quite clear that Rahel was not in love with Varnhagen in the truest meaning of the term, that his *personality* did not fill her with the same transport as hers did him. Possibly she was thinking of her feeling for Varnhagen when she said:

"Not our first, as the proverb says, but our last love is the true one: the one that commands all our powers."

But in that case the words were called forth by the mood of a moment. For her feeling for Varnhagen did not command *all* her powers. One among many proofs of this is the fact that it was Varnhagen, not Rahel, who complained that Berlin life hardly ever gave them a quiet hour together.

In the home they lived in longest,[1] and until

[1] Maurerstrasse 36; they lived at first at Französische Strasse 20.

Rahel's death, she delighted in the large and lofty rooms, as she did in the garden of a neighbour, where "there was air and fragrance, as in a forester's lodge." In their apartment everything was simple; a few portraits and busts were the only things, besides flowers, that were not necessary. But all the arrangements were so comfortable and convenient that the whole impression was more tasteful than great elegance could have made it. That a piano and books were counted among necessaries goes without saying.

Rahel was one of those women, still very uncommon, who combine an unfettered "living out one's life" with order and regularity in all the relations of everyday life; in this trait again she was as far removed from the Romantic School as she came near to Goethe.

On this point Rahel says some golden truths: "Only the best people are punctual. Only the best know that even the most highly-purified earthly existence is subject to conditions and cannot be carried on without the greatest regularity in the ordering of the commonest things around us, and that only by this can time be economised, which we can never seize or recall; only the best people submit themselves to these conditions. . . ."

"*Le positif* of life consists in living out what is imme-

diately before us. . . . To feel the present moment, to be able to deal with it, that is the art of living; the more we have of this in us, the more positive we shall be, and the more positive will be our experiences."

Through these qualities she was able, in spite of increasing ill-health, in spite of her time being "robbed, stolen, and torn to pieces," to keep the house in excellent order, to see that Varnhagen could work undisturbed, and still to find time for her own more personal interests. But all this required so great an expenditure of energy that she sometimes sighed for solitude, that she might be left in peace to be ill. For the desire of not disquieting Varnhagen with her ill-health always made her conceal it as long as possible.

Rahel, like other people of nervous nature, was late in going to bed and in rising. She employed the morning hours in housekeeping and other practical concerns, and in receiving visits. Afterwards she took a walk, visited some art exhibition or rehearsal, or made a few calls. Guests were often invited to the somewhat late dinner, or a visitor of the forenoon was asked to stay on, and Rahel took pride in a good and refined table. After dinner she was disinclined to

receive visitors, but employed the time in reading and writing letters. In the evening she often went to some concert or theatre, and was frequently accompanied home by a whole crowd of acquaintances, who propounded their criticisms in her drawing-room and listened to hers. The conversation was often so lively that the guests did not leave before midnight. On the other hand, if Rahel spent the evening at home, the visitors arrived an hour or two earlier, but the evening passed so pleasantly with conversation and music that it lasted till an equally late hour.

It was her own experience that Rahel expressed in the words: "Finely-organised people must have amusement," and it was her delight to offer this to others in its noblest form. She herself no doubt underrated her genius when she asserted that her famous "social gifts were nothing but kindness." But their most important part was nevertheless the warmth that radiated from her over every one, great or small, celebrated or not.

Rahel in her inmost soul was a motherly nature. Though herself deprived of true motherly affection, she says the most beautiful things of what

motherhood ought to be. Motherliness forms an essential part of her love, and she sums up her nature in the words: "I am a mother without children."

"Yesterday I was meditating on human suffering and love, and thought: The greatest passion loses its black magic, its mortal sharpness, *when one has a mother as she ought to be*. . . . Then misfortune can never come upon one so devastatingly, every relationship becomes gentle and clear and must take a purer form, and at the very beginning the evil gives way before the worthy and lovable and departs into 'the night of the heart,' . . . as Fichte says. Imagine a young, loving mother like me, the dearest friend, the most intimate confidante of her children, their companion in games, in music, society, dress, life, and thoughts. Almighty Lord, what a close, sure support this is! *Such a mother is God's deputy on earth.* O God, there *is* a happiness in this confusion of misery here below, but nobody performs his office and the world goes to ruin. . . ."

All children loved Rahel as dearly as she loved them; their own playmates could not play or laugh with them better than Rahel. They always had something to tell her and she to tell them, and to be with Rahel was the greatest joy of her brother's children, as it was hers to have them.

Jean Paul once expressed his opinion that she

ought to have remained unmarried.[1] She replied that in these words he condemned marriage, and that she would never submit to an unhappy marriage.

"He who does violence to my inmost consent and my inclination, will only keep me as a prisoner."

If he meant that she and Varnhagen in an inner sense were already married, and might thus remain unwedded in an outer sense, then she agreed on her own behalf and on that of all those who belong to each other of necessity. But if Jean Paul intended his words to be taken absolutely, he was as much mistaken about her inmost nature as her most malevolent censurers, for thereby he denied her children.

Rahel's marriage was childless; but she, who thanked God for "every bit of childish innocence," found a compensation in her niece's little daughter, Elise, who in Rahel's later years was the "medicine of her soul." Her descriptions of their companionship, of the little one's words, behaviour, and emotions show how passionately she worshipped this child. And when she had had the little girl

[1] "She [Rahel] is an artist, she begins an entirely new sphere, she is an exceptional being, in conflict with ordinary life and raised high above it, and therefore she must remain unmarried."

with her for a time, she felt her heart "dashed in pieces" at having to send her and the other children back to their parents, after having at last been able for eight whole weeks to live "with, for, and only through them." "I put flesh on them by my care and made their souls grow and their minds arise and bestir themselves." All day long she had been at their disposal, and for half the day she had been out with them in "wood, field, and garden." But now that joy was over, and she was left alone to grieve that others had what ought to have been hers, what her love gave her a right to. . . . "It does not avail me to be past the age of amorous love; *I suffer nevertheless.*" This is Rahel at fifty-nine, complaining to the young Heine.

In another letter to Gentz she speaks of still having a "love-heart; I love a pure dewdrop from heaven with a new tenderness, never felt before." She complains of being forced to suffer even in *this* love, since the child in an outward sense does not belong to her, although in an inward sense it does. For the child has her blood, nerves, and nimbleness of spirit, its "heart is tender and strong." At the same time Rahel is glad that Elise is unlike her in being graceful, pretty, and

frivolous, and is thus "agreeable to God and mankind!"

Rahel and Bettina Brentano have each given a charming description of the other's way with children, in Rahel's saying of Bettina that she behaved with them "like a mythological nursemaid," and in Bettina's insisting that her children's governess should treat them "exactly as Frau Varnhagen does."

And the more ill-health limited Rahel's world to her four walls, the more did her eyes find their delight and her heart its repose in that fragment of eternally-young nature, a child.

Even from her childhood Rahel's strength of will had sustained her through the physical weakness and severe sufferings which would have turned another woman into a selfish and fretful invalid, a trouble to herself and to others. Instead, she made use of these sufferings to help her "to be better, to feel sympathy, not to be indifferent towards the poor and afflicted." Even when in physical pain she sustains her soul by "meditation, insight, enthusiasm, joyousness, kindness, innocence." The years thin the ranks of relatives and friends, but enough are left for a select little band

to collect around her from time to time. And some of the members of this circle satisfied at home the thirst for music that Rahel could no longer quench outside.

Some severe attacks of illness had already presaged the change for the worse that took place in Rahel's condition at the beginning of 1833. After a few weeks of fluctuation, neither her will to live nor love could keep death back. She died on March 7th, two months before she would have completed her sixty-second year.

Thus ended the nineteen years of a married life of which Varnhagen testified that during it, and after it, Rahel was always "the youngest and freshest" part of his life.

Several years after Rahel's death Varnhagen again expressed his astonishment

"at the unique combination of vital forces and virtues she presented. In her the fire of primeval creative force still burned with a bright flame; she still had all the warmth and brightness of a being fresh from God's hand. I know nothing that is like her; talents and powers others may have in equal or greater degree, but none her spirit. She knew this well and said and wrote to me: 'You will never see my like again.' She was right. Sooner will a second Goethe, Spinoza, Plato appear than another Rahel."

## CHAPTER IV

### RELIGION

THE ideas, which are called by preference religious, had always occupied Rahel. But, as is often the case with young people, the sorrows and joys of her own circumstances disturbed the calm that is needed for meditation and piety. As one grows older, life settles down of itself and, to the soulful person, the questions of the meaning and aim of life increase in importance with the shades of evening. So it was with Rahel, who showed herself more and more what she had been all her life: one of those natures, religious in the profoundest sense, to whom everything is religion, but who, in Schiller's words, from religious motives profess no religion.

She was born a Jewess and baptised a Christian on her marriage, but gave her faith to neither doctrine. She was almost a child when the two men died, who, directly and indirectly, had re-

formed the position of the Jews—Moses Mendelssohn and Frederick the Great. But she was already penetrated by the spirit of the new age, and the peculiar features of either Judaism or Christianity had no importance to her. On her deathbed she said that she had been thinking of Jesus and had felt for the first time that he was her brother in suffering. Like Goethe, she reverenced the person of Jesus, but they both remained cold to the religion founded in his name.

So long as Schleiermacher was pantheistically mystical, Rahel was with him. But when he drew near to positive Christianity, she definitely held aloof. Her soul foreshadowed to her a new religion and she was convinced that the present form of the Christian religion was "an almost accidental phase in the development of the spirit, and one that had lasted too long." And in a profound observation she points out *the incompatibility of Christianity with earthly life.*

"This whole doctrine arose and was invented in a state of the soul that cannot last; it is the phase of consecration and rebirth. . . . It is really the religion which, in its holiest form, ought *of itself* to appear and work and live in every soul and which properly speaking ought not to be communicated. . . ."

"Christianity is not adaptable for community of

practice or as a religion of duty. But since it made demands of renunciation and self-sacrifice, it spread like a *passion* over the world; and it is worthy and beautiful in those hearts where it reigns as a passion; but, when applied to the State and to life, it has been perverse and a hindrance for ages. . . ."

Rahel has here laid stress both on what is significant, at certain stages of the life of humanity and of the individual, in the doctrine of the Cross, and on the unreasonableness of this doctrine being imposed upon the race as its religion. Rahel, like Goethe, like Schleiermacher, like the mystics, sees the source of religion in one's own spirit; a religion given from without is to her a contradiction in terms; only the religion that comes from the individual himself, springing from his being and fashioned according to his needs, is genuine. She insists that she herself can learn nothing, "no religion either"; for religion is "the last intimate act" between man and "that which I may not name." As soon as this relation acquires a name, the religion becomes untrue. The great, divine, and infinite, Rahel—"savage" that she was—had found out in her own way. And she called it sin and blasphemy not to let every one "make such discoveries for himself."

To Rahel suffering was the way to her discoveries, in religion as in other things. "The heart must break or be illumined," she says of her brooding over grief, and herein she gives the reason why religiousness, in her opinion, never can be or ought to be inculcated. To Rahel it is blasphemy that prayer, the outpouring of the soul, should be extorted at fixed times and places; it seems to her monstrous to make a child adopt a formula in which many great questions are answered, "which the child would not have proposed to itself . . . a sad spectacle of stifled intelligence!" And she would gladly grant childhood what she finds to be its peculiar happiness—not to form any "image of life" but to live in the present, although she knows that this happy state, which she calls "the first human nature," cannot last, that "brooding over things is the nature of the spirit," or, as she also calls it, "the second human nature."

In the course of her own brooding, which we may call lifelong, she had found "that the whole difference between people's minds lies only in their questioning: they must all answer in the same way"; and that it is of the utmost importance, above all in the loftiest subjects, not to receive the

answers before the questions, but to try one's self to find the answers as the questions arise. And, she thinks, man is capable of this, for his soul is not obscured by any "fall," a doctrine which Rahel called an "error insulting to God." With Spinoza, whose works she knew and loved, she denied the freedom of the will, and on this point she uttered the profound saying: "To be free can only mean to be permitted slavishly to follow one's inmost nature."

"Insight is free, but not will. These are confused. What we must desire is fully determined in us; it is, so to speak, ourselves; thereof we are made; our will is only, as it were, a limb which we can move here or there. . . .

"Only through a joint-insight (into the divinely-led course of the world) can we win freedom."

But at the same time she knows that the insight which liberates us is conditioned by time; that truth is only the ever-growing insight into the real nature of things, while "the Truth," which every nation and sect thinks it possesses, is nothing but a local truth, which has its own time in which to develop, live, work, and die. As a characteristic proof of this, Rahel quotes the fact that it was the titled, ruling, uniformed class that con-

demned Jesus as a heretic, blasphemer, and instigator of revolt, while now the Christians are in power and condemn the *others* in the same way.

The older she grew, the more Rahel was filled with that piety for which she sought expression above all in the Bible, in Goethe, Angelus Silesius, Saint-Martin, and other mystical-pantheistic spirits, whose thoughts poured "as though out of a religious sea," and who were therefore entirely opposed to such as construct a *definite religion* with a mosaic of dogmas: "My mind is indignant and my soul revolts at such pretensions," she says. The religion Rahel had made for herself was a belief in God which sometimes expressed itself in passionate supplication and exultation, quite in the spirit of the Old Testament. To Rahel's *feeling* God was unmistakably personal, a God to whom she cries in her need, on the hem of whose mantle she rests—an all-sustaining, all-embracing God, upon whose aid she relies as did David and Isaiah. But when she *thinks*, she feels that this personification of God may be a limitation.

. . . "Even the general conception of the personality of a primal being appears to me restricted and arbitrary, but I cannot help it, I find myself always brought back to this, and I cannot let it be taken from

me; the universe and the whole spiritual creation appear to me only as limbs, to which there must be a head. Without a personal God everything seems to me mutilated, as it were, deprived of that which alone gives the rest life, beauty, and meaning."

Nevertheless she kept this personal God—although her faith often passed into pantheistic universal feeling—as she did her belief in a personal immortality. On both points she differed from Goethe, who, in using the word God, did not attach any idea of personality to it, and who was convinced of immortality, but only for those who had been able to create it for themselves.

Whether Rahel defined to herself this difference between her view of life and Goethe's, appears to me uncertain, and if she did so, it was altogether immaterial to her. For to her as to him feeling was everything in these matters, and she could no more doubt Goethe's piety than his existence. Rahel's metaphysical needs were certainly more urgent than his. On this point there is a saying of Rahel's which is characteristic. She is speaking of Benjamin Constant, who inspired in Mme. de Staël the great love of her life. Rahel fully understood the charm Constant exercised, and she enjoyed his "*enjouement ironique*" so

long as it was directed against the incongruities of existence. But it annoyed her when it took the form of scepticism towards all the profound questions of life. Just because he is right in saying that life is full of contradictions and confusion, says Rahel, the craving for reason, goodness, and justice, which is inherent in us, is a pledge that in some way we shall attain them all. And she concludes by regretting that Constant's "ironical humour came from so deep a source, and that he did not draw still deeper from that source."

Rahel's religious feeling has an Oriental earnestness; her capacity of Jewess, grown up in an age of rationalism, made of her a freethinker, it is true, but one who preserved her reverence for any honest religious faith; she had herself suffered from the prejudices against her race and could not fall into intolerance. If she speaks slightingly of romanticism, it is only because she finds a lack of sincerity and seriousness in this "new Catholicism." When, as in Novalis, she finds mysticism deep and great, she loves it. But if, on the one hand, she understands romanticism through her love of such minds as Novalis, Lavater, Saint-Martin, Angelus Silesius, on the other she approaches the age of enlightenment through her sympathy with

Lessing. And in her foremost teachers, Goethe, Fichte, Spinoza, she found that union of lucid thought and deep feeling that she loved above all. The friend who called her a "philosophical naturalist" indicated her standpoint most correctly—unless it be a contradiction in terms to speak of the *standpoint* of a subjectivist thinker, which is like that of a sailor on a voyage of discovery! For subjectivism as regards one's view of life implies that the soul preserves a listening attitude, both towards the revelations that rise from its own depths, and those that are borne in upon it from the exterior world. To Rahel everything was revelation, great minds and little children, the perfect creations of art and the smallest works of nature. She, who paid her devotions in no church, lived devoutly at every moment, for, as she herself said, she found her church everywhere. And if she gave her faith a more personal expression than did Goethe, she felt with him that "life is the great primal essence, from which all flows, with or without our intervention." To her as to him piety means above all the constant thought that the conditions of this particular moment are given us as material to work upon, so that we may thereby become conscious collaborators with life.

Rahel was a mystic in the sense that it was by intuition, by feeling, not by abstract reasoning, that she gained her insight into the depths of life, of death, and of the human soul, and when she was faced by the inscrutable or the unknowable, sought light in solitary contemplation or some other means that lay within herself.

Rahel, who "*begged to be excused a Paradise with angels,*" felt it a necessity of her own nature, of that of humanity, to hope for "a holy, free, and inviolable state." And with this hope of "*ever new experiences*" she calmed her heart before the thought of death.

On the loss of dear friends—losses which she calls her "shedding of leaves,"—as during her own repeated attacks of illness, her thoughts were centred with increasing frequency upon "death, which, next to life, we do not understand."

Much as she had meditated before on life's incomprehensibility, in the face of death life became "the great, holy, amusing riddle," and the possibilities of the new life she divined "in moments of true perception" became the serious problem.

Of its solution she writes: "I confine myself to the marvel of existence in general; if this is

possible, then the incomprehensible will one day be comprehended. We must become better, we must be good; that is the problem."

She writes these wonderful words on death: "Is it more wonderful than life, that torn-off fragment, at the end of which it comes? He who helped me through the dark womb will also bring me out of the dark earth! I *will* live; and therefore I *must* live. My sense of life, my need of happiness, order, and reason, are to me another pledge of all this: how otherwise should I have come by them? These are my God, my innermost recess, where are also my temple and my religion. If I may die at any moment, then I am already dead; that is, I continue to live dead. But I *feel* my *life* and not death. . . . We shall certainly be young again. We must receive a new, much-enhanced youth and go on living in it. And we do already live on in one, an inner one."

But at another time her thoughts of death are more pantheistic: "But, alas! we are only a drop of consciousness. And I should wish so much to go back into the sea, to be nothing at all in particular!"

Of her state of soul as she was growing old she gives this beautiful description: "After the conclusion of our appointed lot we have the same feelings as before its commencement. A kind of vague, inquisitive, youthful existence, an existence that belongs to the sum of being. If then, we have once been compelled to lose ourselves, it is a beautiful thing to experience this little bliss, this second childhood, while still upon earth. . . ."

Thus Rahel lived a pious life and died a pious death without having sought light, either in life or in death, in any definite religion.

In the midst of manifold and poignant sufferings she preserved her faith in a good and great meaning in existence, in the divinity of life, and in its loftier connection.

In a deep sense it is these feelings again, though in the form of the idea of *evolution*, that have founded the "new religion," the approach of which Rahel divined, thanks to the "chaste, reverend solitude of the soul," that was to her the first condition of genuine piety, as of profound religious revelation. Fichte may have confirmed Rahel in her inner conviction that individuality involves the promise of eternity. He had, she said, "turned her best heart outward and made it fruitful." His doctrine of the *ego* harmonised with Rahel's individualism, and the element of vital force and personal power in Fichte inspired in her a deep admiration for her "dear lord and master," at whose sudden death she wrote the affecting letter in which she says that Germany had now closed one of her eyes and that she trembled for the other, Goethe.

But she subscribed neither to Fichte's nor to

any one else's system. For in every one of them she found that something "living with us, belonging to us" had been immured "as a dead, killed thing." And therefore she knew that her own opposition to every system was not due to "the spirit of contradiction" but to self-preservation. She, like Goethe, could never for a moment doubt the sovereignty of life—changing, developing life—and any attempt to prescribe, in any respect, a fixed form for what was constantly changing was to her, as to him, foolishness.

The divine was as near to her as the air, it was in this that her soul lived and moved and had its being. Indeed, it has been rightly said of her that the soul of the world vibrated in her soul with such strength that her fragile being trembled with the force of the God it enclosed. But any attempt to approach God's nature with analysis and argument "cut into her like sharp knives."

Rahel has expressed the new religious morality of our time and its only religious *conviction* in the profound words she wrote a few days before her death:

"The more immanent life there is in a conviction, the deeper and richer will be its association; the more it appeals and corresponds to all our capabilities,

the more difficult it will be to summarise it and set it forth just like a piece of machinery. But every system tends to become a machine. There is only one great and living organised system: the created world, which is still creating itself."

## CHAPTER V

### FELLOW-FEELING

It has already been mentioned that in Rahel, as in the rest of the young Jewish community, the battles and victories of Frederick the Great awakened the sense of solidarity which causes the various elements of a nation, in spite of their dissimilarities, to feel as one people. In this respect war has a uniting power, which peace unfortunately does not yet possess.

But when Rahel called the Jews of Berlin "Frederick the Great's Jews," she was thinking in the first place of the new spirit of the age, which Frederick had fostered and which extended its influence through him—the spirit of free thought and tolerance. We all had a share in his victories, in his judgment, says Rahel; "he gave room for every plant in his land thrown open to the sun."

And unless the Jews had really been warmed by

this sun, neither Rahel nor the rest of the young Jews would have felt that they were Prussians.

But in Rahel the feeling of patriotism was born simultaneously with that of cosmopolitanism, and therefore *both* were unusually deep for her time. Like the foremost of the younger generation in every country, she embraced the ideals of the French Revolution, and to her these were personified in their most eminent representative, Mirabeau, whom she often saw during his visit to Berlin. He was, she says later, a man, in the making of whom nature had rejoiced, as he afterwards rejoiced in nature, which made her rejoice in him again, and this mutual rejoicing made the rest of us rejoice in both.

But it was not only in her youth that Rahel put her faith in the ideas of which Mirabeau was the foremost champion. In spite of Goethe's dislike, certainly more opportunist than profound, of the French Revolution, in spite of the reaction of romanticism against it, Rahel maintained through life her democratic ideas and her republicanism. For her aristocratic individualism was so profound that it *included* ideas which outwardly appeared to exclude each other.

All her life she sympathised with the working

classes, "because they are the most numerous and the poorest." Indeed, their sufferings sometimes make her wonder whether the refined culture, which was her highest gratification, might not be too dearly bought.

"I also considered the whole mass of human culture, and whether its quintessence, the highest delight of noble, richly-gifted persons in each other, and every other bright and lofty element in life, is worth all the suffering and misery of those whom it has required for centuries as its manure. Working carmen and myself suggested this thought to me."

But if she had really been confronted by the question whether, for instance, she would sacrifice the existence of the great minds, if that were for the moment the condition of the welfare of the many, she would certainly have answered no. With prophetic vision she saw the possibility of a state of things, in which the great and the small would *mutually* create fully human conditions of life for each other. Since her intuition was thus in advance of the time, she was ready, when St.-Simonism appeared, to perceive that it aimed at just this higher state of things, that it was the logical consequence of the innermost aim of the French Revolution—the establishment of human

worth *and* the elevation of the human race. Rahel's view of society included both the idealism which creates the future, and the realism which forms the present. Thus, during the Napoleonic wars she is an ardent patriot, who clearly perceives the immediate problem—that of liberating Germany from the French domination—and she finds the warmest expressions for her love of her afflicted country. But never for a moment does a spark of national hatred shoot up within her, and war itself she hates with her strongest abhorrence. It is to her "the proof that we are still living in the midst of the greatest barbarity; that wound-giving war, insane capture, and defence, may come to our very threshold; that we are not above the level of savages." That Varnhagen is out among the perils is her personal sorrow. But this gives way before her deep sympathy with the universal distress, and before her shame at the terrible events, unworthy of humanity, which she is witnessing.

"O dear, beautiful, slighted peace! O God, how beautiful is peace! As beautiful as youth, innocence, health, all things which we only appreciate when we mourn their loss. . . ."

She abhors all manifestations of chauvinism. The

qualities with which we Germans ought to adorn ourselves, she says, are "rectitude, moderation, and obedience to the law." Against the boastful and narrow forms of nationalism she aims the following words:

"My country shall never make me narrow-minded The folly that is committed there vexes and surprises me enough."

"The time will come when national pride will be looked upon as self-love or other vanity is now, and war as brawling."

And to the interpretation of history that encourages chauvinism she objects that history in the hands of the unintelligent only does harm, since every error has its ancestors and will have descendants; that the world, light, and nature are the *real* history, and that the *intellectual* development of nations is their true history.

Of Rahel it may be said with truth that no dogma, no patriotism, no love is capable of corrupting her sense of justice. And she insists that it ought to be the special task of *women* to act as the conscience of their male friends and prompt them to act for the good of humanity. Otherwise, Rahel thinks, women are only a heavy ballast in society. Every woman, says Rahel, ought to be infinitely more soulful, noble, good, and helpful than the man to whom she

belongs . . . . That women ought always to be neutral, so as to relieve impartially the distress of all, is another of her sayings. That development always necessitates some form of strife, Rahel understood quite well, but she foresaw a future in which strife and victories of *minds* will be the only surviving form of the rivalry of nations as of individuals.

"Science it is that now claims its *veni, vidi, vici.* Let the rude battles of the poor nations give way! Professors should be their victors!"

"The world is no longer so uncivilised as to be fashioned and taught to think by warlike deeds. This must be done by our best thinkers and poets, the noblest of the nation."

Far from sharing in the hatred of Napoleon, Rahel, like Goethe, entertained a great admiration for Napoleon's mighty personality. In the midst of German Gallophobia she preserved and gave utterance to her admiration for the great values of French culture. She herself practised, and was proud that the Jews showed more of it than the Christians, that liberal and effective sympathy which does not enquire after nationality but only after need of help. There was a time that Rahel called her "festival of benevolence." Rahel

was in Prague, when she found herself in a position to bring order and seriousness into the voluntary nursing of the wounded. She now employed in the public service the talent she had hitherto tried only in private life, that of bringing people together, since she had the power of drawing out the best, the uniting elements in human nature. She is able to write: "God has smiled upon me; I am of some help." She, who is "insignificant, of humble birth, and impoverished," now finds herself in a position to do good on a large scale; she has the happiness of seeing severely-wounded soldiers "suddenly smile with joy" at a word from her. She comforts the sick, encourages and admonishes the convalescent. And how she did it we may guess from these words of hers: "I often weep; they have mothers as we have, who would weep themselves to death if they saw them now. . . ." She rejoices at the discovery of her own talent for organisation and management, and in her consciousness of it she exclaims: "If only I had some profession!" The same feeling took hold of her during her activity in Berlin at the time of the cholera in 1830. As she then gained insight into the conditions of the relief of the poor, it became clear to her that women were wanted on the

boards of management, so that cleanliness, clothes, work, and so on might be obtained for the poor when in health.

In a word, it was for *collective motherliness* that Rahel wished to prepare a place, it was to find an outlet for her activities in this direction that she desired "a profession." But with a perfectly correct perception of what was the only office she, with her nature, was qualified to fill, she at once explains that she would like to be—"a princess!" In other words, to have power to exercise in a fully personal and grand style the activity she individually loved, according to the beautiful words: "Making a business of doing good is my only amusement, consolation, and source of strength!"

Rahel's outcry during that Vienna Congress: "Fie, Christians! And so they are tinkering together something in a congress again!" is one among many expressions of her view of the policy which, at the Restoration, made a system of reaction on a Christian basis. But Rahel found fault not only with the diplomacy and war of the old régime; she regarded even the *reforms*, which were looked upon as so important by the liberals,

as worn out. It was time, she thought, to recognise one's ignorance and to leave off building society upon no other foundation than fables of one's own making: "A new discovery must be made. . . . Man has still imagination to spare for ideal conditions, and this imagination demands material, food. . . ." She hopes for a great man, capable of "discovering a lofty view of life of universal application, a new religious element, so to speak, which should contain a severer view of morality, and which should give to all prescribed actions another direction, a new ambition."

Nothing more clearly shows Rahel's prophetic power than the fact that as early as 1820 she was aware of the inner connection between the future and higher order of society and a religious renewal. She knew also—the first French Revolution had taught her—that the compact "errors, which it is impossible to get out of people's heads, finally fall with those heads." She foresaw the Revolution of July, and she felt that, although the peoples of Europe were clamouring for liberty, the question at bottom was one of "equality and rights." As to the *forms* of these Rahel had no hard-and-fast views.

What Rahel says of herself in general is appli-

cable to her political opinions: "I never have beforehand any result in sight or in my mind and am always ready to conceive things in an innocent way."

Against the superstitious political doctrines of the Romantic School she directs such ideas as these: "Every constitution is nothing else than a rule for the welfare of all in a given case."

"The time is a spirit and creates its own body."

"The spirit of the time is nothing but the generalisation of each particular conviction."

With a keenness of vision that was equalled by few men of her time, Rahel saw that the promises of constitutions, by which, during the Napoleonic wars, the governments had tried to calm their peoples, had "outgrown the promisers as children outgrow their parents." And suddenly, Rahel continues, the children confront their parents with powers and rights which the latter never thought about at the christening!

What liberalism aimed at in her day, and what socialism was beginning to demand, appeared to Rahel as links in the same necessary development. She saw the madness of a social order which demands, in her own words, that the majority shall show themselves good Christians and renounce the good things of this world in favour of the minority; a social order in which, as she points

out, industry, inventiveness, and intelligence are not in themselves sufficient to secure to their possessors conditions of life worthy of humanity; a social order the movement of which Rahel truthfully calls circular and not progressive.

"All movement must be referred to something human; that is, in this case, something universal, something that concerns all men, otherwise all movement will finally become pagoda-like, childishly ridiculous, meaningless. That, wherein all men *cannot* finally share, is not a good thing; that, wherein they *ought* not to share, is bad. . . ."

Just as it was a Frenchman, Saint-Martin, who during the last phase of Rahel's life most intimately harmonised with her religious mysticism, so was it another Frenchman, Saint-Simon, who during the same period gave her prophetic vision its direction in social questions. Saint-Simon was all the more sympathetic to her, in that his view of life also had the same fundamental tone as her own. She only feels happy in the new doctrine, since she has really been preparing herself for it all her life.

"It . . . finds in me a fully-living, well-arranged supply of ideas. I have not suffered alone, but with all mankind, perhaps in a way that is unique. . . .

And nothing interests me deeply but that which may make the earth better for us, the earth itself and our actions upon it."

Saint-Simonism is to her "the new, grandly-discovered instrument, which at last touches the great, ancient wound, the history of mankind upon earth. . It has already brought to light irrefutable truths, arranged the real questions in order, and answered many important ones. . . ."

"How to beautify the earth: my old theme. Freedom for all human development: the same. . . ."

"I am the most profoundly-convinced Saint-Simonist. For my whole faith consists in the conviction of the progress and perfectibility of the universe, its development to ever greater understanding and welfare in the highest sense; happiness and making happy."

And Rahel knew that the condition of all was to "find that unity of life, in which vocation and inclination are merged in each other."

Rahel's specific objection to Saint-Simonism is that it calls itself a new religion. For, she thinks, it was doubtless religious, but had not the distinctive marks which belong to the idea of religion. Nor need it make use of the word religion, she thinks, for it has the sanctified knowledge—the knowledge, *capable of proof*—of the good, the wholesome, the just, everything that must now be to us "God's holy countenance."

Rahel's deep social feeling did not, however,

lead her astray into the two prejudices that flourish in our time. First, that of setting duties towards society before duties towards one's self. Rahel, like Goethe, like all genuine humanists, knew that I must be something myself before I can be anything to the whole community, and that much inner life is required to become anything. The other prejudice is that of assuming the existence of all the virtues in the uneducated class, but in the educated class the contrary state of things. Rahel chose her friends from all classes, wherever she found a genuine human element, but to find this combined with genuine refinement was her highest joy. "Noblemen I am often fond of, the nobility never," she says. She sharply corrects the want of civility a countess permits herself towards her. But she lets her faithful maidservant take her meals at her own table when not well, and when, during Rahel's last illness, this servant calls her, as usual, "*Gnädige Frau,*" Rahel exclaims, as though with relief, "Ah, we 've done with Gracious Madams now! Call me Rahel."

These little incidents were of a piece with the rest of Rahel's behaviour to her servants. When some one objected that she was "spoiling" them

by too much friendliness and consideration, she replied that this was not impossible, but that in that case she was egoistic enough to prefer to spoil her servants by such treatment, rather than by treating them otherwise to spoil herself.

Even in the now burning servant question she was so much before her time that she found it "unnatural to be a domestic." And she was convinced that those mistresses who complain most of their servants, would, if serving themselves give occasion for just as many, if not more complaints!

Rahel's social feeling was an unusually deep one for her time. "To help God in his creatures" was her delight. But she was not only charitable, she was just. Therefore she longed for "just, pious, pure-hearted, true inner equality among men." And here it is above all that she joins "Young Germany." She feels she is living in a "transition to better conditions," and she thinks that in certain cases these conditions would come about of themselves, if governments did not quite positively work in opposition to the welfare of the people.

"To all nations the heavy, dark, patient earth offered her fulness; there was no need of warfare or lying—nor of proclamations of justification!"

The reactionary phase after the Napoleonic wars did not quench in Rahel the glow of the ideals of her youth, whereas so many of the men who, like her, had hailed the French Revolution with fiery young hearts, had become backsliders from its ideas. And when those whose minds had once revolted against the misery of society began to talk of the will of God or the order of the world or historical necessity, Rahel cried: "*We* shall make it different!"

So long as she could, she relieved the distress with which she personally came in contact, especially the distress of poor old people. But she held aloof from public charity, which she found too often combined with the spirit of prodigality, a spirit which *she* found inconceivable when poverty was always pressing heavily on the majority. And, moreover, she clearly saw how impotent charity is on the whole in dealing with a state of society the *foundation* of which needs to be reformed.

From 1807, when Fichte gave his "Addresses to the German Nation," until his death, Rahel's social circle took its tone from him. If she afterwards compared his influence on her with that of Saint-Simon, she did so presumably from the point

of view that the highest aim of each was the ennobling of mankind, although Fichte laid more stress on the individual, and Saint-Simon more on the social conditions necessary thereto, and although these two great minds sought by different paths to lead men towards this end.

For this end Rahel also lived, directly and indirectly, every moment of her life. Just as Rahel united in a great synthesis aristocratic-individualistic and democratic-social views of society, so were pessimism and optimism merged together in her, as in George Eliot, to form that view of life which the latter called "meliorism." And is not this the only view of life possible to one who is capable both of observing and thinking, both of feeling and dreaming?

Rahel never shared the longing of the romanticists for bygone times. On the contrary, she was filled with ever-increasing admiration for the present, "the beloved, honoured present." And it is characteristic of her clear sight that she instances the growth of the *feeling of solidarity* as the surest proof of the progress of the race; she points out that Europe is now thrown into a state of agitation if "injustice is committed in any corner of it." She indicates the increasingly-

conscious desire that all should not only be better but should be able to live better. She instances the material improvements that have been introduced in her time, and exclaims: "Yes, it is a pleasure to me to live now, since the world is really, actually moving, since ideas, happy dreams enter into life, and since mechanics, industry, inventions, and associations are realising these dreams." Knowledge of what ought to be, Rahel thinks, will finally conquer, even if this knowledge has to wait "a thousand years for the sunshine that is to make the plant grow!" She knows that "the present is also future," and that to possess the future one does not need to live in it. And her joyous conviction, "it 's moving, the world," is no less joyous because she goes on to say that the world moves too slowly to allow her to be present at the feast.

Nothing more beautifully illustrates Rahel's fellow-feeling with mankind than her own words, written in April, 1831:

"Now I have thought out an epitaph for my self. It is to run:

" 'Good people, when anything good befalls mankind, in your joy have a kindly thought of mine.' "

# CHAPTER VI

## SOCIAL LIFE

THERE is something that we people of the present day feel the want of in the midst of our many-sided activity, our feverishly-competitive work; something that we miss more or less consciously and that we are in the habit of calling "time to live." One might write a book on this significant expression; here I only touch upon complaint from one side—that part of our existence that is called social life.

We are all agreed that nowadays we have no social life in the old meaning of the term. We encounter one another on all sorts of occasions, but we seldom really meet. We usually go home without having exchanged any ideas that have brought us nearer to each other's real nature or nearer to reality in a single respect. Instead of the sense of intellectual acquisition and agreeable repose that a private reunion ought to leave behind it,

we take home with us in most cases the impression of a loss.

Whose fault is this? The men's, say the women. They are communicative with each other in the smoking-room and at the club, but have no mind for the soulful intercourse of former days, at once refined and confidential, with women. But are the men really to blame for *all* the evil in this world? As regards social life in particular, the truth is, of course, so well known as to be a commonplace, that it is woman who shapes social life and gives it its tone and substance. Is it not possible that *one* of the causes of the disparity between what social life is and what it might be may be looked for in the modern innovation, that not only do the men work hard, harder than formerly, but that many women also work and thus arrive tired and listless at the gatherings where formerly they were the living force? Can the men of our time say that they receive more from the women than the women from them in the way of powerful, personal impressions, stimulating talk, health-giving cheerfulness? Hardly!

But the modern woman's equality with men in the matter of the burden of daily work is not the only cause. There are deeper-lying reasons why

social life has lost its significance even as refreshment—*recreation* in the literal meaning of the word—and still more as a means of putting ideas in circulation and extending the intellectual horizon. As social life is an expression of life itself, of the tendency of development, of the mistakes or advances that are taking place, we can find, by comparing a modern social evening in an intellectual circle with the pictures we have of Rahel's gatherings, the chief difference between the tendency of her time and that of our own to be this: the highest aim of the former was culture, that of the latter is tangible results.

During the latter part of the eighteenth century we may say that intellectual interests in Germany were applied to literature, the theatre, and other arts, while political life was dead. A book, an evening at the theatre, an article in a review were at that time great events.

Goethe's ideal of culture was also that of the age. And this ideal was the loftiest, for it involved a constant striving to unite organically the best intellectual values with one's own personality, and to make of one's self the highest possible intellectual value.

In Germany at this time, as in France a generation earlier, women exercised a great influence as vehicles of culture. They did not create works of art, seldom wrote books, did not systematise ideas. But they assisted the mutual agreement between different departments of culture and the dissemination of the various products of culture; they thus performed in the intellectual world the same task that insects perform in the world of plants.

When the men of that time speak of the women who exercised in Berlin this rich influence on intellectual life, there is always one to whom they all ascribe not only a mediative function, but an inspiring one.

As in the flourishing period of Athenian history we have glimpses of the figure of Aspasia, who, herself creating nothing, was to Socrates an inspiration of wisdom, to Pericles of eloquence, to Sophocles of poetry, and to Phidias of beauty of line, so we divine in the background of the Berlin of Schleiermacher and the Humboldts, Fichte and Hegel, the Romantic School and Young Germany, the figure of another woman, Rahel, who exercised a similar influence.

It would carry us too far to quote even a small

part of the references to Rahel which confirm what is here said.

Schleiermacher, her friend of many years, says: "Rahel presents the rare phenomenon of a human being who is always concentrated, who can always command her whole self." Alexander von Humboldt calls her his "long-proved friend" and lays stress on the extraordinary circumstance that, with so much suffering, Rahel had preserved such cheerfulness and gentleness, that with so much genius she also possessed so much heart. Wilhelm von Humboldt, who in her young days found her "surprisingly sensible and witty," indeed, the most entertaining person in Berlin, says, after the publication of her letters, that it could be said of this book, as of no other, that there was not a dead letter in it. And he testifies that he had never met Rahel personally without her giving him the "suggestion" of a serious reflection or a living emotion; that her *mental development was her own work* and that her intercourse with notable men had had little influence upon her. For, on the one hand, she had already worked out her fundamental views before she came in contact with them, and, on the other, both her *ideas* and their *form* were original to such a

degree that it was impossible to attribute them to any influence from without. "Above all," he concludes, "truth was a distinguishing trait in her intellectual and moral nature." Ranke speaks of her having the instinct of a Pythia. Oelsner calls her an "explorer of souls" and at the same time a glorious child, splashing in the waves of time, but a child with an instinct that carries her further than all the "school and worldly-wisdom" of men. Another found in one of her sayings "matter for thought for a whole lifetime." Gentz compares Rahel's rich, ever-active, and fertile understanding with the male element, his own boundless sensibility with the female; and so, he says, together they produced "ideas and feelings and sayings, all quite unprecedented." Goethe and Jean Paul, the romanticist and Young Germany, all agreed in their opinion that Rahel possessed such depth of thought and feeling that a flash from her soul "illuminated far wider expanses than sheets of dissertations."

Is any better proof required of the uniqueness of Rahel's personality? For it has only been given to a few exceptional persons to be held in estimation by three consecutive and mutually counteracting periods.

To Rahel's first salon, formed entirely by the power of her personality, belonged the three pairs of brothers, the Schlegels, the Humboldts, and the Tiecks; Schleiermacher, Fichte, J. von Müller, Gentz, Fouqué, Prince Louis Ferdinand, and, for a shorter time, Kleist, and several others, both Germans and foreigners, of more or less celebrity. Among the foreigners was the Prince de Ligne, one of the choicest personalities of the age, a master of the social tone of the *ancien régime*, the tone that was Rahel's ideal for intercourse. She found Berlin society "rude"; it caused her "a real, incessant pain," but De Ligne's tone, on the other hand, was "a real greensward, a sofa, a gondola for the soul." But that was just what Rahel's own social gatherings became.

The most immediate influence of Rahel's salon was that her countrymen began to see what a conversational tone, light and full of meaning, ought to be. She herself found the German language still somewhat undeveloped as regards "life for the day," and she tried to prepare the way for that "sociableness in words" which she hoped the Germans would one day attain. The sociableness which Rahel characterises as "a conscious, agree-

able co-operation for the enjoyment and reproduction of all that humanity has produced," *that* is what she calls with reason "half her life," while empty sociableness was her horror.

She did not foresee, however, that a time was approaching with such a passion for individual interests that nothing was left over for the interest in each other that gave the salons their ethical importance; none of that calm that gives an æsthetic perfection to speaking and listening. No doubt Rahel's time, that of the great Revolution, of Napoleon, of the Revolution of July, was even more agitated; no doubt the spirit of the age was already transformed by Napoleon's spirit, and the unlovely fight for power was soon to take the place of the beautiful effort for culture. But as yet the only effect of all this was to make life feel richer and fuller of possibilities. And a Rahel might hope that the social culture she was creating was the glow of sunrise, not, as it proved to be, of sunset.

Rahel is a living refutation of the oft-repeated delusion that really good tone, the genuine art of society, consists in levelling individuality to a certain uniformity. Rahel, on the contrary, could

say that "every least word of hers was connected with her personality." And it is very characteristic of Rahel that she explains her popularity at a watering-place as due simply to her being "true and having independent views; this extends even to my gestures. I am the only person here who has any opinion." She ventured to contradict all without hurting any one, since they all felt that the *matter* was what was important to Rahel, not the impression she was producing, not any pride in being right. And although of course Rahel did not give others credit for the same rich originality as that from which her own keen-eyed observations, witty conceits, and profound words of wisdom proceeded, she yet recognised that all might be entertaining, if only they would be as frank and independent as herself. She could say with truth that, when she met the loftiest minds on their stars, she had come there by her own way.

Rahel's conversation was of another kind than that of the Frenchwomen whose salons have become celebrated. With one of these, Mme. de Staël, Rahel came in contact personally, and her judgment of Mme. de Staël is extremely characteristic of herself.

"Understanding she has in plenty, but no listening soul; it is never calm within her, never as if she were reflecting in solitude, always as if she had already told many people of it. . . . It never becomes music; nor does she keep to any theme. . . ."

And Rahel complains that, with all her gifts, Mme. de Staël has no "calm, innocent sphere of the soul."

It was just such a sphere of the soul that surrounded Rahel and that made the circle to which she gave her stamp differ both from the society of the French age of enlightenment and from that of the German age of hero-worship. There was a great silence behind Rahel's words:

"There is a play of colour in our breast, so delicate that, as soon as we try to express it, it becomes a lie. . . . This shyness restrains me from speaking. A feeling is beautiful, so long as it has not become history; it is the same with life itself."

And from this it follows that, genuine as she was in social intercourse, she yet gave her best in conversation with a single person. She felt that "one is never really in a person's company except when one is alone with him," and she understood how, in the midst of a social gather-

ing, to find an opportunity for such exclusive meetings.

Apart from social life she could do so even more often. Bettina speaks of their lonely evening hours, when Rahel in a few minutes could impart so much, through that "intercourse in the spirit" which was peculiar to her. Bettina also insists that the most beautiful feature of Rahel's soul was her "penetration of the individual." Thereby Rahel became so "perfectly kind," so forbearing where others condemned. . . . "To be just is a divine art," Bettina concludes, after having thus thrown light upon Rahel's character in one of her happy expressions: "Rahel could still taste the saltiness in what others had thrown away as the ashes of a burnt-up life." Rahel on her side enjoyed these conversations with Bettina, in which they were like "two beings soaring over the earth," and said profound things to each other "about human beings, not about people."

While other celebrated conversationalists, like Mme. de Staël herself, preferred to lead up to subjects in which they themselves could shine most, Rahel was eager to avoid those in which her hon-

esty would have compelled her to use a frankness unpleasant to some people.

Rahel said: "I spare my friends my censure. You, when necessary, I certainly shall not spare. My freedom of thought, my pride, my contempt for all fettering opinions are only for the wisest and most intimate among you; but to every mixed company that comes to my house I am bound to offer friendliness and agreeableness—like tea and ices. This is no question of virtues, but of becoming forms of intercourse. . . . Without these there is no wit, no frankness, no merry letting-one's-self-go."

G. von Brinckman, from whose description of Rahel's social art the last and several of the following quotations are taken, concludes thus:

"Only thus did she, the unpretending bourgeoise girl, without brilliant connections, without the universal passport of beauty, and without any considerable fortune, succeed in gradually collecting about her a numerous social circle, which was beyond comparison the most delightful and gifted in the whole of Berlin. A circle, to be admitted to which royal princes, foreign diplomatists, artists, scholars, and business men of the first rank, countesses and actresses were all equally eager, and where each was worth no more, but at the same time no less, than the impression he himself produced by his cultured personality."

Rahel laid great stress on human intercourse as

a person's best means of culture, even surpassing books. "Men belong together," she said, "in order to use their reason, to love, and to exercise justice!" No doubt in the last case Rahel herself was determined by her personal sympathies—who is not? But she possessed the most important qualification for justice, in that she granted to every one "each and every quality" and that she had affection for "all that feels or seems to feel." Above all she had the art which she calls "a difficult, nay, an unlearnable one: quickness of sight!" She congratulates herself on her "sure eyes," which went right through accidentals to the essential. She admits, however, that she was far too credulous: people had only "to weep and wish" to make her believe them capable of the nobility they desired! But otherwise Rahel has proved her right to the praise she gives herself: of being "an expert in the knowledge of the heart and of human nature." If she found herself deceived, if her feeling had subsided, she did not conceal it. She did not expect of herself that everything should be everlasting. But she was not one of those who "have no memory in the heart"; on the contrary, she was a faithful nature and possessed, as she said herself, "a terrible supply of heart and life." She

was thus able to include in her sympathies the most widely different persons and destinies. Towards her real friends she was what she called herself in another connection, a Don Quixote. She is a confirmation of E. B. Browning's saying: That knights errant are more common among women than among men, and that Cervantes, if he had been a Shakespeare as well, would probably have made his Don a Doña.

These are characteristic sayings of Rahel's: "I cannot resist the current within me. What I apprehend, I embrace in the whole extent it has for me, and in my whole depth, *immediately*, *very rapidly*. Thus it is always with me, that is why I have so soon finished with mediocre things and, on the other hand, *never* with better things."

"In my breast men press and die as on a battlefield, none of them knows of the others, each must die for himself. . . . As I will not have peace, and as there are men like the sands of the sea in number, I must bear all, as the earth does."

Rahel's receptions began at five o'clock, or even earlier. No one was specially invited, but all felt that they were welcome, when the hostess met them with quiet, simple cordiality. Any one who tried to account to himself for the strong impres-

sion she at once produced, soon found that it did not depend upon beauty but upon harmony. She was small, with an unusually good figure, delicately built and full, with a quiet grace in all her movements. Her dress, always simple, tasteful, and individual, was in agreement with her whole appearance. She had clear eyes, which looked straight before them and "were observant and communicative at the same time"; her delicate features beamed with intelligence and would have shone with courage, if sorrow had not cast its shadow over them. A smile, generally melancholy, sometimes roguish, played lightly over the fine mouth, and her voice sounded as sincere and melodious as her smile would have led one to expect.

Her drawing-room was filled by degrees with the most eminent men Berlin could show in the literary, scientific, and artistic world, and with women remarkable for beauty and charm. But Rahel would seldom have more than two such women on the same evening, for she knew that a greater number of ladies always disturbed the connection and productiveness of the conversation. Rahel, however, made no speeches and, indeed, did not speak for long at a time; her form of communication

was like the lightning. She only dominated the company indirectly and never tried to make herself its centre. She brought together those who might have something to say to each other; she listened in the grateful and alert way that is the first art of a hostess; she was often silent, when she had induced others to talk; she united the threads of conversation and sought out points of contact between all the persons of different nationality, age, and opinions who surrounded her.[1] And of these some were old friends, some new acquaintances introduced by those friends, or celebrated foreigners. "All parties get on with me," she said; "they regard me as a question, as indeed I am; and sometimes as an honest and courageous answer." She tried to find room for every legitimate claim; her kindness sought out those who were overlooked and placed them where they could make themselves felt. She did not even neglect her own insignificant relatives, but tried

[1] "Every one was busy in a natural way and yet no one was obtrusive, they seemed just as glad to listen as to speak. . . . With what freedom and grace she [Rahel] knew how to animate, brighten, and warm those about her. It was impossible to withstand her gaiety. . . . Her sallies were wonderfully unexpected. . . . I have heard magnificent sayings of hers, true inspirations, often in a few words, which flashed through the air like lightning and reached the inmost heart." (Brinckmann.)

to bring them into the conversation, so that they might not feel that they were outside the circle. She seldom failed to catch "a look, a pulse-beat of genuine humanity," and with the highest and lowest alike she had only one manner, that of kindness. While according recognition to every one, she maintained her own standpoint with gentle but inflexible energy. In the atmosphere of truth that surrounded Rahel, the others became sincere; she sought so perseveringly and faithfully for every one's real *ego* that she ended by finding it; she communicated so spontaneously the discoveries of her own soul, the experiences of her own heart, that every one else produced his essential qualities and became more soulful, purer, and gentler than at other times. In all this there appears no preconceived design, no arrangement. She has no personal vanity to satisfy, no rôle to sustain, no rivalry to defeat. She never took people on their petty sides; was never fussy with them; did not call upon them to be amiable or to show themselves off; she simply by her own presence created a warm climate in which they all unfolded themselves. It was one of Rahel's articles of faith that to see through people's masks was to do them a good deed, and this good deed she did to all.

No one posed in her presence; "I kill pedantry within a radius of thirty miles, I am such a poison-tree for it," she said. Nor did any one lay down the law. Her own unconstrained naturalness communicated itself to her circle; they talked simply of the highest questions, passionately of what agitated them, and gaily of what amused them. Rahel called herself "savage" in the sense that she hated all empty forms and was herself so free from constraint that any one could speak to her about anything. If a complication arose, she solved the difficulty with her shrewd judgment; she removed subjects of dispute when she feared their discussion would become too heated; if a serious tone prevailed too long she led the subject to a new point of view, and her tact restored jesting to its proper limits, if it had overstepped them. Moderation and mobility, repose and variety, self-command and freedom marked the society that Rahel led. During pauses in the conversation there was music on the piano, which was left open all the evening; Rahel herself was an accomplished pianist, besides being a passionate lover of music. Simple refreshments were served and the company broke up about nine o'clock, while all impressions were still strong and no

weariness had made the spirit of the party flag. It might happen that one or another, Prince Louis Ferdinand, for instance, stayed on to improvise on the piano, for which he showed a happy gift, or to talk more intimately than had been possible in the larger circle. But as a rule the evening closed as all such evenings should, at its climax. Every one felt he had enjoyed what Rahel considered social life ought to be: "A condensation of and a point of departure for everything moral." They took with them the memory of a varied exchange of ideas, of a deep, but not pedantic interest in art, literature, and science, of real discussion of important questions of the day, of well-weighed judgments, of fertilising, not negative criticism. And the men in particular, however different they might be amongst themselves, from a Schleiermacher to a Prince Louis Ferdinand, "Prussia's Alcibiades," all felt that they had seen a revelation of a genuine womanly nature, or in other words of that which to them was the poetry of life. *That* is what men long for, what men seek. And when they do not find this directness and freshness at home, nor yet in society of "good tone," then they look for it in that of bad tone. *Natural* women, who had a strong and rich

nature to reveal, were always the best inspiration of great poets, and no literature was ever fresh and beautiful during periods when women were not natural, not direct, not themselves.

There we have the final reason of the decline of our social life. That women have acquired a more independent outward position does not necessarily mean that they are more themselves, richer personalities. Collectively, feminine individuality has developed in our century owing to new fields of work, wider opportunities for education, and other things, but these new means of development themselves easily induce a certain uniformity therein. They must all occupy themselves with the same tasks, the same social interests, and the same works of public charity, so that even those who are not overworked in making their living are made listless and preoccupied, and thus the effect upon home and social life is the same. While in our time *unusual* feminine qualities more easily obtain recognition, there is probably less originality among the majority to-day than fifty years ago, because a certain average level of culture is possessed by all, produced by the same school system, and afterwards maintained by the

same books, plays, and criticisms; no one wants to be uncultivated by deviating from what she believes to be the opinion of the majority; thus we find that every one has exactly the same ideas and opinions and expresses them in exactly the same language! No one will purchase her freedom of thought and action, her right to be natural, at the price of being called pretentious, affected, or narrowly egoistic, as is the usual consequence of dissociating one's self from one's circle, whether in opinions or manners or habits of life. A woman therefore arranges her house, her habits, and her dress according to the taste of the day; she manages her sympathy and her charity, her social feeling and her admiration collectively; the personal element is ever less, while the public contribution of woman's work is ever becoming greater.

This uniformity in women's thought, feeling, and action is not, however, an expression of the sense of social duty and responsibility. Woman is still too apt to feel as an individual where a sense of solidarity is required, and collectively where she ought to be individual. The community, the home, and social life all suffer from this confusion of ideas. Until women are penetrated by the two qualities which Rahel profoundly calls the source of all

other virtues, "*justice for others, courage for ourselves*," neither the life of the community, of the home, nor of sociality will approach the fulness of meaning which they might attain.

It might be objected that Rahel was not only exceptionally gifted but enjoyed an exceptional position. She possessed, for instance, a small fortune, which gave her time to devote herself personally and by correspondence to social life and her own culture. If she had been bound by work, she could not have been the same. Both as an unmarried and as a married woman she occupied a position in society which did not involve any burden of appearances to be kept up, but gave her the opportunity of forming whatever connections she pleased; and, having grown up during the period of the Revolution, she had already freed herself from a number of prejudices. It was also of importance that she had no inclination towards public production to claim her mental powers; that her husband shared all her interests, while nevertheless their life together was not of that all-absorbing kind that isolates a couple from the outside world, and finally that she was not tied by motherhood. She thus possessed in an unusual degree the opportunity of imparting

intellectual benefits within a considerable circle. But that she did this depended in the first place on the fact that she was, after the death of Mme. de Staël and before the appearance of George Sand, what Brinckmann calls her, "the most remarkable woman of her time," its most distinguished feminine personality both by her gifts and by her originality. Rahel's most comprehensive significance lay in augmenting the productiveness, humanity, and culture of her time by herself everywhere seeking and teaching others to seek the truth; by everywhere encouraging them to manifest their own culture; by imparting to others her profound way of looking at religion, men and women, literature and art; by judging everything according to its intrinsic value, not according to its deficiencies; by everywhere understanding, because she loved, and giving life, because she believed in liberty.

But this, which Rahel accomplished on a grand scale in the social and public life of her time, could be promoted in some degree by every woman, each in her own circle, if she would learn to understand what was the secret of Rahel's power, what the age is unconsciously or consciously thirsting for, what is indispensable to the health of art

as well as of life—a full development and a courageous communication of one's personality.

It was for about ten years that Rahel's first salon exercised its great influence. The disasters of 1806 scattered some of its members and gave those who were left new occupations and anxieties. During the years when Rahel and Varnhagen were constantly on the move, Rahel certainly made her ennobling influence felt in every circle to which she belonged, but to none could she give her tone until she was once more able to open her salon in her own home in Berlin.

And then it was proved again what a "human magnet" Rahel was; her second salon was "the garret, but on an enlarged scale." And as Varnhagen also collected people about him, Rahel, who on her return found herself "surrounded only by graves," was soon once more in the centre of a circle intellectually alive, in which some of the old friends and many new ones afforded her the joy of genuine human intercourse. Through the Mendelssohn-Bartholdy family she came in close connection with the musical world. Rahel, who during a severe illness at Prague had been refreshed by Weber's playing in the room next to

hers, and to whom Beethoven, without being asked, had played a whole evening, became every year more eager for music. Her own musical education had consisted of Bach and Handel, and all her life she was most deeply affected by these two masters. She compared Bach with Kant, by whom she was otherwise quite uninfluenced, and calls Bach "the metaphysical, God-fearing, gifted with the highest sagacity," while Handel brought her "into the realm of the higher melancholy, into an anticipation of bliss." In Mozart she saw a "divine being"; for Spontini, whom she personally knew, she had a high respect. But Weber's operas displeased her on account of the then fashionable "Teutonism," which in them found one of its many expressions, disagreeable to Rahel. She was enthusiastic about Paganini, and on the whole nothing of importance in the musical world escaped her.

It was, however, not only the music, but the whole spirit of the Mendelssohn-Bartholdy house that she loved, for "it is all truth there." She often sees Amalia von Helwig, as they live near one another, and Rahel bestows on her her highest word of praise; she is "real." Besides these, some of the most notable visitors of the Varn-

hagens' salon are Schleiermacher, Alexander von Humboldt, Hegel, Gans, Ranke, Chamisso, Fouqué, Achim von Arnim, Bettina, Henrik Steffens, Heine, and Pückler-Muskau. With Uhland, Rückert, and others Rahel had come in contact during her years of travel. For the rest, Rahel always blends Bohemia with the aristocracy. It was her joy to be able to say with truth: "All classes, all kinds of people talk to me." And as all kinds of people collected about the Varnhagen couple, their drawing-room became a power that spread culture and distributed intellectual values far beyond the limits of Berlin. This power of giving the tone and fixing the value explains the ill-natured words about Rahel which escape certain authors, Immermann, for example, who were strangers to her circle. The impression Rahel produced at this period upon every one who *personally* came near her, is vividly shown in some remarks of Grillparzer's.

"Varnhagen went home with me. As we passed his house, it occurred to him to introduce me to his wife, the afterwards so celebrated Rahel, of whom I then knew nothing. I had been strolling about all day and felt tired to death, and was therefore heartily glad when we were told at the door that Frau Varnhagen

was not at home. But as we came down the stairs, she met us, and I submitted to my fate. But now the lady,—elderly, perhaps never handsome, shrivelled by illness, reminding one rather of a fairy, not to say a witch,—began to talk, and I was altogether enchanted. My weariness disappeared, or perhaps, rather, gave way to intoxication. She talked and talked till nearly midnight, and I don't know whether they turned me out or whether I went away of my own accord. Never in my life have I heard any one talk more interestingly or better. Unfortunately it was towards the end of my stay, and I was not able to repeat the visit."

Grillparzer left other similar observations about Rahel, in one of which, for instance, he says that she was the only woman to whom he would have wished to be married.

Heine calls Rahel "the most inspired woman in the universe"; he describes his acquaintance with her as the beginning of a new epoch in his life, her home as his fatherland, and herself as his "patron saint." He even declares that he ought to wear a dog-collar inscribed: *I belong to Frau Varnhagen!* When absent from her he had only to pronounce her name to be "cheerful and in a pleasant mood." Heine also characterises Rahel's style admirably, when he compares her with Börne—whom Rahel also came to know and appre-

ciate—and calls them "the Bacchantes of thought, reeling in holy intoxication after the god."

In general, nearly all the authors of "Young Germany" declare that they received more stimulation and impulse from Rahel than from any other woman. It is after Varnhagen's publication of her letters—that is, after Rahel's death—that this influence becomes so powerful. For during her lifetime she had had little or no contact with any of them, except Heine. Laube, who, however, was among her acquaintances, calls her letters the most open-hearted book in German literature and herself "Rahel the truthful." T. Mundt finds in these letters "a movement of elemental force and a development of original personality," and calls Rahel "the sympathetic nerve of the time"; in her "infinitely emotional personality" are combined "the anxious pangs of a period of transition" with "prophetic insight into the future." Gutzkow admired in Rahel, amongst others things, and as a contrast to the usual feminine culture, her "higher receptivity." Gustav Kühne not only gave an admirable characterisation of Rahel, but also a rapid picture of her outward appearance during the later years of her life. From the former this telling judgment may be quoted: that Rahel

constituted in her own person "the emancipation of the thinking woman," since she revealed what woman can achieve as a thinking being through "solitary detachment and superior intellectual force," but that this thinker-woman owned at the same time the most womanly soul, a soul full of sympathetic tenderness, through which she was before all things, always and everywhere a "comforter of the heart."

Kühne retained a striking impression of the only occasion on which he saw Rahel, the figure clad in black, the pale face, the small, white hands clasped together; but above all her "dark, deep eyes" remained in his memory. For a long time it seemed to him that these eyes followed him, with their manly, intrepid light; he felt that there was not only a searching, but a "dissolving power in the persistent gaze of her meditative eyes."[1] Even in 1830 a stranger, who saw Rahel for the first time, lays stress on the wonderful freshness of her clear, delicate countenance, and on the firm, easy bearing which her short and, at that time, somewhat stout figure maintained. Such was

[1] Kleist too seems to have felt the power of Rahel's look, as he says that her words were as expressive as her eyes.

the external impression Rahel communicated in her later years to those who gathered round her, still charmed by what Varnhagen calls her "talent for life," by which she "gave beauty and harmony both to social life and to solitude."

The stranger in question has described a social evening at the Varnhagens' in March, 1830. He tells us how, as the first arrival, he witnessed Rahel's motherly care for her little Elise, and afterwards saw her attend to the comfort of a pair of aged guests with the same solicitude. The conversation first touched upon a question of religious orthodoxy and then passed to music, one of the foreign visitors taking up the cudgels on behalf of Rossini; a celebrated singer went to the piano and gave songs by Schubert and Beethoven, to which Rahel listened with tears in her eyes and a happy smile. When the music ceased, some one mentioned a political piece of news, and as politics were just then a burning topic, a lively debate ensued, in which Rahel interjected a few remarks. Thus she succeeded in preventing the dispute from becoming heated; she purified the air with "rapid flashes of light humour," which always occasioned a little "shock of surprise and pleasure," whereby the uncomfortable feeling was relieved.

The conversation then turned upon Henriette Sonntag, who had recently returned to Berlin, and her musical coquetry was attacked. But Rahel defended her as an expression of the time. Henriette Sonntag was a product of the prevailing conditions, from which greatness and loftiness had disappeared, while "moderation and agreeableness" had come in their place. It was E. Gans that Rahel was addressing, and he was so struck by the truth of Rahel's idea that he asked leave to work it out in a musical review, which with Rahel's permission, he afterwards did. Then Alexander von Humboldt arrived from the Court and soon every one was listening to him, as he described the different kinds of piety he had observed in the course of his travels and classified them according to their types, as a botanist classifies his plants. On his departure the conversation reverted to French politics, and among other observations Rahel uttered the far-seeing words, that the republic is in the blood of every Frenchman and that France would be a republic sooner or later. To the French people, "my ancestral people" Rahel called them, a republic is inevitable; if they should fail now, they will make one attempt after another till they succeed. For

every Frenchman has in him a certain self-glory and will submit to an abstraction rather than to a person.

While Rahel was talking in this spirit the visitor noticed how she, who had at first "appeared so gentle and modest," became profoundly serious, her eyes firm, her expression almost defiantly convinced of the truth of her prophecy, which concluded thus: that, even if interludes were possible, the great events of the time would nevertheless advance over these fortuitous circumstances, "making them into the dust of its way." These last words, characteristic of Rahel's way of expressing herself, were spoken so earnestly that the spirit of them took hold of everyone, though the majority doubted the fulfilment of the prophecy. Then Bettina von Arnim arrived, and into "her impetuous flood of wit and thought" Rahel only interjected a few rapid observations and soon was content to listen, charmed like the rest, to this winged, fascinating, inspired art of talking, which was the final impression of the evening.

Even in my short summary this description may give a living picture of what those who had spent an evening at Rahel's carried away with them, and of Rahel's own power of setting ideas

in motion, of enlarging points of view or extending the horizon.

It is very significant that Rahel, who sees in Wilhelm von Humboldt a desire to transform everything about him into "the property of his understanding" and "to leave as little as possible on earth with which he had not come in contact," should complain that this desire was not combined with a more profound relation to the matter at issue. He would defend to-day what he attacked to-morrow, he strewed sophisms and paradoxes around him during discussions in which he was interested not in the question itself but in the fire of words and conflict. Rahel thought less of the brilliant "intellectual freedom" with which he accomplished this, when she found that he did not use this freedom in the cause of intellectual liberation. As these features, which thus cooled Rahel towards Wilhelm von Humboldt, were just the ones that most commonly marked the Jewish intelligence, it is noteworthy that Rahel so clearly perceived the thinness of such talents, which she well characterised in the following remark on one of Humboldt's political pamphlets: "The soup is excellent, but it does not give us any joint."

Other women, both before and after Rahel, have exercised a social influence of the same tendency as hers. I was not fortunate enough to know Malwida von Meysenburg before that late period of her life when she could see only a few visitors at a time. But in spite of this I received an impression of what she must have been to the select cosmopolitan circle that gathered in her drawing-room in Rome.

Personally I never saw George Eliot. But Sonia Kovalevsky described her receptions to me as intellectual solemnities, in which the hostess herself, by the quiet gentleness of her presence, her voice, and her smile, made the atmosphere warm and peaceful, even during lively exchanges of opinion. George Eliot herself preferred to listen, and it was only some profound subject that induced her to take a more active part in the conversation. Sonia Kovalevsky herself was a brilliant conversationalist, but had no talent for holding a circle together. Many other names of women, more or less eminent, might be mentioned in this connection, especially of French women. But on the whole it seems incontestable that in Rahel the influence of the European woman *in and through social life* reached a height it has not

attained since. Those women who have since formed famous salons have either had a name of their own in literature or art, or have acquired an influential position through a husband in the political or aristocratic or intellectual world. But no one has attained this position, as Rahel did, *exclusively* by the power of her own personality, nor exercised it *exclusively* through her gift of intercourse in the finest and greatest meaning of the term.

In this relation some acute opinions of Rahel were expressed by a Frenchman, the Count de Custine, who met Rahel at Frankfort a few years after her marriage. He says that he was "irrevocably captivated, without being in love," a condition which he calls "the most perfect of all relations between human beings." To arrive at it, he thinks, is a difficult problem, but Rahel solved it by her frankness, her truth, and the magic of her mind. She gave life, Custine says, "to a large circle as well as to a *tête-à-tête*; her gift was genius in the service of society and sociality." Rahel, he continues, never found it beneath her dignity to occupy herself with everyday concerns, while at the same time none of life's important affairs lay beyond her vision. Whatever she took

up, she did thoroughly; she never tried to play a part, never calculated an effect, nor required to do so. For her delicate sense of tact always guided her aright in social life, as did her sense of beauty in nature and art. Rahel would only have friends. She did not talk to excite admiration but to reveal her inner nature, and this was so rich that she had no need of external activity. Life itself was to her a continual work. She lived and talked with her books as with living creatures. She put soul into everything, and in her world everything had its use; she had "the mind of a philosopher and the heart of an apostle," and this in spite of her being "child and woman, as much as any one can be." "She felt as an artist," and she "reached the highest truths by the two paths which usually exclude each other: by feeling and reflection, by divinatory examination, by intuitive insight."

Rahel's significance as a force of culture may be best summed up in Custine's words: "In a more highly organised society Rahel would have been to the nations what she was here to a little circle of intimate friends: a light to their minds, a leader of souls."

Unfortunately *our* time has not yet arrived at this higher organisation; on the contrary, it is

probable that Rahel is now less appreciated than by her own age. For, while culture was the highest aim of that time, we have now almost lost the idea of what culture meant to the mind of a Goethe or a Rahel.

## CHAPTER VII

### GOETHE

EVERYONE knows that, as is always the case with what is great and new, his contemporaries were slow to appreciate Goethe. That he was not understood by the great public, who put Kotzebue far above him as a dramatist, is not surprising. But that a Lessing, for instance, could say of Goethe that he really attracted attention by the mad things in his Werther, and that if Goethe became sane there would not be much left of him, is significant, as is the fact that the first collection of his works sold so badly that he had to look for another publisher for the second. That Moses Mendelssohn understood Goethe as little as did Lessing, that Klopstock remained cool, that all the old school was hostile to him, and that it was only the Romantic School that began to speak of him as a prince of poets—all this must be remembered. For otherwise we

shall not realise what intellectual independence is implied at the close of the eighteenth century by a young woman like Rahel drawing a bright halo about Goethe's name simply by the way she pronounced it: like something which ought not to be mentioned on the same day as anything else!

That kind of literary historians, to whom the spirit of the thing is a hidden mystery, are always hunting for dates. To them it would be an important matter to find out, for instance, who it was that first induced Rahel to read Goethe (!)—as though people could not find the sun for themselves—or to establish whether it was Rahel or some other woman of literary influence who first directed attention to Goethe's significance, and so on.

Just because Rahel had such a deep reverence for Goethe it may be assumed that it was ***not*** she among the influential ladies of Berlin who first began to talk about him, to read his works aloud, and to clothe herself in admiration for him.

Thus, for example, Rahel tells how she remained dumb even with a genuine admirer of Goethe like Bettina; how when once in the autumn sunlight at Montbijou Bettina talked "beautifully and ardently"

about Goethe, "I behaved as if I did not know him at all. So it was often with me."

That Rahel, like other live young people of her time, herself discovered Goethe, lived in him and on him, and gave him all her soul, before any one asked for Rahel's opinion, clearly appears from her own statements.

She says of her garret in her father's house (the italics are mine in the first three instances): "There is my mausoleum. There I have lived, loved, suffered, rebelled, learned to know Goethe. *Grew up with him*, idolised him boundlessly! There I lay awake and suffered through many, many nights, and looked at the heavens, the stars, and the world with a kind of hope; or at least with violent desires. I was innocent." . . .

"*A new volume of Goethe was a festival with me;* a lovely, glorious, beloved, honoured guest, who opened new gates for me to a new, unknown, bright life. *Throughout my life the poet has accompanied me unfailingly.*

"I went into partnership with his wealth; he was always my only, surest friend, my safeguard against being terrified by spectres, my superior master, my most moving friend, of whom I knew what hells he had known!—in short, *with him I grew up*, and after a thousand separations I have always found him again. And, as I am no poet, I can never say what he has been to me." . . .

"When I think of *him*, tears come into my eyes:

every one else I love with *my* strength alone; he has taught me to love with *his*. And I do not know how much I have yet to love. How often have I thought already: your nature cannot endure more; and then my nature changed. *My poet!*"

Thus Rahel lived in Goethe long before she began to talk about him. But when she did so, as in her first salon, she had words of admiration, as one of her hearers tells us, which surpassed all he had heard up to that time.

And *that* is the important point, not whether it was Rahel, as Varnhagen thinks, or the Schlegels, who began to spread the cult of Goethe—not who first *called* Goethe "lord and master," but who *felt* most deeply that he was so. And the most important point of all is that Rahel's enthusiasm was kindled through her own profound understanding of Goethe; that, independently of all currents of fashion for or against him, he *remained* the centre of her intellectual existence; that her feeling for him was a complete confirmation of her own words: "No enthusiasm must blow *from without*, it must blaze up from the holy altar of our own spirit."

Thus Rahel taught her contemporaries to live in the spirit on and through Goethe; taught them

that he was inexhaustible as nature herself; that "from other great minds we receive truths, but from him the truth."

In a word, Rahel perceived, as none of her contemporaries, Goethe's right place in the history of the development of the human mind, and gave it him in these words: "*The nations always murmur against their great men: Moses, Socrates, Goethe, need I recall Christ?*" And *she* was capable of seeing that which we now, a hundred years later, are beginning to see, when the distance of time has set its golden background behind Goethe's figure and when he has been endlessly commented on and interpreted. Through her loving understanding, her religious reverence, she reached a point in her worship of Goethe which the whole of humanity will not reach for a few centuries yet.

The most remarkable thing of all is that Rahel penetrated to the depths of Goethe's mind without knowing any more of him than his then published works. All the riches that have since been brought to light, above all his wonderful letters, were unknown to her. But in spite of this she was able to pierce through all the false notions that were formed about Goethe the courtier and

official, the dignities his contemporaries most admired in Goethe and thus believed to be his own chief preoccupation.

In this connection I have heard a significant utterance of Ulrike von Levetzow: that, if she had understood that he was *Goethe*, she would perhaps, from flattered pride, have married him; but, like those around her, she saw in him the distinguished old *Geheimrat*, who talked about stars and stones and flowers, while she found all this tedious and listened so badly that Goethe used to say: "Is my dear child not listening again?" And when he gave her his works with notes made specially for her, she put them on one side and, on Goethe's asking her one day: "Has my dear child been dipping into me? was obliged to confess with shame that she had not!"

So little idea had a young girl "of good family," about 1820, of what Goethe was, when she was the object of his love! If we compare her with Rahel in her garret nearly forty years earlier, the maturity of Rahel's understanding of Goethe will be seen for the first time in its true light.

Rahel lives in, and like every child of her time receives impressions from, the age of enlightenment, the period of the Revolution, the romantic age, Young Germany, and Saint-Simonism. But there is not one of these phases in which Goethe does not exercise *an influence incomparable with*

*all others* on Rahel's view of life, even when she stands nearer to certain of these manifestations of the time than he does; a difference in attitude which depended partly on the disparity of their ages, partly on that of their characters. But Rahel could combine her love of Goethe with her sympathy for movements which to a more superficial view would appear irreconcilable with her comprehension of him. She could do this because she had penetrated so deeply into Goethe that she understood that he was not *against* the movements of the time, the idea of national unity, for instance, and the demand for social reforms, but that he looked at them from a higher point of view than public opinion.

It was the same with Goethe's view of life. While the Romantic School, in its enthusiasm for "faith," which Rahel found lacking in calmness, chasteness, devotion, and reverence and therefore regarded as an æsthetic pastime, ignores Goethe's piety, Rahel has the most intimate comprehension of it. In connection with Spinoza, whom she loves because he has "the fine character of the thinker, that of being honest, impersonal, gentle, calm," she enters into Faust's answer to Gretchen's question about his religion. Rahel calls this

answer "the most beautiful prayer." "And how many prayers," she continues, "has not that soul poured out, that gives this answer!"

I divide men and women into three groups: those who are "*Goethereif*,"[1] those who are not yet so, and those who will never be so. Rahel may be called Goethe-ripe in the fullest sense; in that she not only understood Goethe most profoundly, but lived wholly *in his spirit*—a thing which cannot be said of his romantic admirers, male and female. Her wisdom of life, as concentrated in the words, "to feel the present moment and to be able to seize it, that is the art of life," is like drops of honey from Goethe's hive. Rahel advised a person in sorrow to read *Wilhelm Meister*, "*as others read the Bible.*" And just because Rahel herself read Goethe so, she found more in him than any one else did. How Goethe had penetrated her being is shown in the way she quotes him: in every mood—sorrow, or joy—he is her master, guide, and oracle. She reads him when young and on her deathbed; indeed, the

[1] This expression has been ascribed to Auerbach. But, as Frau Professor Furtwaengler informed me, it originated with her mother, Frau Dorn, who made use of it in Auerbach's presence. He was so delighted with the word that he asked to be allowed to adopt it, and thus it passed into general use.

last words she read and wrote were by and about him; she ranks people according to their understanding of Goethe, and she regards the furthering of this understanding as the task of her life.

When Frau von Wolzogen told Rahel that some of her sayings about Goethe had done him a great deal of good, accustomed as he was to misunderstanding, Rahel felt deeply grateful that *she* had been able to bring happiness to him, that "king of the Germans, of these blind and unhappy people who will awake a century after his death." At the same time Rahel utters the moving words, which, spoken by her, one feels to be true: that, if she knew any one who could love, honour, admire, worship him more than herself, understand him better, interpret more correctly "every word, every syllable, every sigh," who was always "in agreement and satisfied with him" in the same degree as herself, then she, Rahel, would remain for ever unknown to Goethe and would "lead this other one to him." Yes, she declares, if there was an empress "who was born to worship him, I would almost give her my heart and my insight—would certainly often lend them! . . ."

"My existence has come to his knowledge: that this man should know what it was to be worshipped, acknowledged, studied, grasped, and loved with discerning hearts by his contemporaries was the height of all my earthly desires and tasks. This perfected human being, this representative, who includes all others in himself and has such power to show them to us. This priest, this true messenger! He now says with satisfaction that he is understood—that is, loved, loved with a love that only he could evoke. And *this I* have given *him*."

Rahel has a right to this proud certainty. It is worthy of note that Emerson uses the expression "representative men" in just the same sense as Rahel here uses it of Goethe. But while Emerson makes Goethe representative in a restricted sense, Rahel does so in an unrestricted, and thus shows that her insight was deeper than Emerson's.

It was an unspeakable joy to Rahel when she found (through *Wahrheit und Dichtung*) how fully she had understood Goethe and his work. For she had seen by his writings that his life must have been full of "great afflictions," and to the ridiculous myth of the cold and clear Olympian Goethe Rahel did not contribute a syllable.

One of Rahel's deepest sayings of Goethe is that in *Wilhelm Meister* he had created a second Don Quixote; that Goethe and Cervantes, by seeing with pure eyes, became the vindicators of

the human race. Through all "follies and errors" they show the "true figure and deepest soul" of their heroes: the purest, noblest, most honest soul, while the world calls them both fools.

Rahel's friendship for a person was measured by that person's love of Goethe. And, if one who was sympathetic to her did not already do so, Rahel had no more lively wish than that he should learn to know and admire Goethe.

If an admirer of Goethe wished to make Rahel's acquaintance, she sent him a message that he was to treat her as an old friend, for Goethe was "the centre of union of all that can and will be called by the name of man." When Prince Louis Ferdinand had met Goethe at Weimar he wrote to Rahel that he knew he was now "worth three thousand thalers more in her eyes." And Rahel on her side rejoiced at the fact that "the most human prince of the age" had learned to appreciate its greatest poet. When the young Heine became Rahel's friend, she enquired how it was with his Goethe-religion; and he was soon able to assure her that he was "no longer a blind heathen, but had received his sight."

Rahel indefatigably recommends Goethe to every young person susceptible of culture as the

great educator of the century in genuine culture. She never neglects an opportunity of crying: "May Goethe live for ever and under all circumstances!" When her friend, the Frenchman Custine, asserted that she went so far in her admiration of Goethe that she lost what was otherwise her most distinguishing trait, her independence, she replied that he was mistaken, for with regard to genius she was never independent, it possessed absolute power over her. Nay, she regards it as her special spiritual good fortune and beauty to be able to love what is good and great with this deep, passionate "worship, with clear consciousness."

She suffers from every word against Goethe, and when Custine, for instance, had expressed some unfavourable opinions in a letter, Rahel returned the letter to him with the explanation that she could not keep any censure of Goethe by her!

Rahel could say of herself with truth that she was the person who would *always* have "worshipped and idolised" Goethe, even if no one else had been found to extol, understand, and admire him. She lived in Goethe so completely that other German poets seemed to her more

or less unnecessary beside him. Like Nietzsche, she found that Schiller, for instance, paled by the side of Goethe.

After speaking with admiration of Schiller, she continues: "But then Goethe comes with his power, his purpose, his perfection, and delineation, thought, maturity, perfection, and power of expression, his hard-won wisdom, his contemplative and surveying melancholy, his wise, distilled cheerfulness, with his *vue d'oiseau*, with his starry gaze, with his godlike breast, where one not only rests but finds peace, then in all other poets there is lacking something—great."

At an advanced age Rahel writes of a festival performance of *Tasso:* "What a joy to me! Eight hundred people had to hear Goethe's godlike words and take them into their souls. . . . Heaven, how I worship *him* ever anew; how I weep at *Tasso*, like the prompter in *Meister*, at every beautiful passage!"

To quote Rahel's many cardinal opinions on Goethe's works would carry me too far. I content myself with recalling the fundamental truth she expresses in the words, that the old poets only knew *woman*, the wife, mother, sister, whereas what made Goethe the new, the modern poet was that he knew *women*, that he had seen into the hearts of individuals and there discovered every nook and corner. How deep is Rahel's saying that, whether Goethe had done

it intentionally or not, it shows the intuition of a great poet that in *Wilhelm Meister* he makes the three women die, who could love—Marianne, Aurelie, and Mignon—since "as yet there is no place prepared for such!" And referring to Goethe's knowledge of human nature in general she exclaims: "How *often* he must have listened and known how to get all kinds of confidences from people, *besides* his own vision!"

Again, in 1827, Rahel writes to Varnhagen of Goethe: "Great the god!" and declares that, when others dare to touch him and disparage him, she sees all the more "that he is a god: in gifts, greatness, domination, harmony, abundance, wisdom, and eternal growth."

Rahel's feeling for Goethe was a deep intellectual love without the slightest trace of amorousness, without a glimpse of the ordinary woman's interest in a great man, the interest which aims at making him interested in herself! The first time Rahel met Goethe was at Carlsbad in 1795. Rahel said it was no doubt "a marvel and a stroke of fortune" that chance threw her and Goethe together, but she felt that there was also a necessity in it; that certain people *must* come together.

Her dignity had withheld her from directly seeking a meeting, or even an exchange of correspondence, and also, no doubt, her dislike of being in any way confused with the kind of women who played at the worship which to Rahel herself was the deepest earnest. Of this meeting she wrote in words as moving as they are profound:

"I always imagine that good wishes, truly heart-felt wishes, which one thinks ought to draw down the stars, must be able to accomplish something. Had I not really the fullest right to see Goethe ?" . . .

"The satisfaction of seeing him and enjoying his society made me less happy than the thought: now you, too, are lucky for once; you, too, have fortune with you, so after all life is on *your* side in *one* thing. For it is terrible to have to look upon one's self as the one creature unfortunate in everything; and this I have done, for, except this, so far as I know, nothing has ever chanced aright with me." . . .

Goethe gave some friends of Rahel's an appreciation of her which shows how, in spite of her inability to appear to advantage when she was deeply moved, he had penetrated her whole nature.

"She is a girl of extraordinary intellect, who is constantly thinking, and full of feeling—where can one find the like? It is a rare thing. Oh, we were con-

stantly together, we associated in a very friendly and confidential way. . . . She is an affectionate girl; she is strong in all her feelings, and yet easy in all her utterances; the former quality gives her a high significance, the latter makes her agreeable; the former causes us to admire her great originality, and the latter makes this originality amiable, pleasing to us. It cannot be denied that there are many people in the world who at least appear original; but what security have we that it is not merely appearance? That what we are inclined to take for the inspiration of a lofty mind is not merely the effect of a passing mood?—It is not so with her; she is, so far as I know her, herself at every instant, always stirred in a way peculiar to her, and yet calm—in short, she is what I might call a beautiful soul; the more intimately one gets to know her, the more one feels attracted and agreeably held by her."

At a later date Goethe calls Rahel "a remarkable, perceptive, combining, helping nature. . . . She does not give an opinion, *she has the subject itself*, and in so far as she does not possess it, it does not concern her."

This pronouncement was occasioned by Varnhagen's sending Goethe (anonymously) his own and Rahel's references to Goethe himself in their letters to one another. When she heard of this, she wrote that, little as she sought in general to assert herself or win approval, *that* had given her real pleasure.

"To be able *once* to lay my really unspeakable love and admiring reverence at the feet of the grandest man and human being, has been, in respect of its

duration and intensity, the secret, quiet wish of my whole life. In *one* thing I have followed my inmost heart, in keeping discreetly away from Goethe. Heaven, how right I was! How chaste, how unprofaned, how well preserved through a whole unhappy life was the adoration of my heart, which I could now show him." And, after saying that this "adoration" pervades all her existence, that *almost every word she has written contains it*, she hopes that Goethe himself will now be able to put this reserve to her credit, since he must see how difficult it is to conceal within one's self in silence through a whole lifetime so loving an admiration.

It is of great interest that Goethe's opinion on the two correspondents is to the effect that one of them (Varnhagen) has the receptive, the other (Rahel) the productive disposition. They perceived this themselves and it was on this account that Varnhagen, whose strength and whose weaknesses were of a feminine kind, felt himself completed by Rahel, whose character showed that union of masculine and feminine nature which constitutes genius. Both felt Goethe's sympathy for their alliance to be a consecration of it. Indeed, Rahel wrote that nothing gave better proof of Varnhagen's love for her than the fact that he also loved Goethe. For, she continues, "one *cannot* love without loving Goethe;

he is the ideal, expressed in terms of reality: life itself." And Varnhagen on his side writes that he meets with Rahel in Goethe's writings as much as in her own letters. For in the former he finds "the same purity of vision, the same strong, truthful nature, on the whole more practical than anything else, but at the same time lovable and exceedingly idealistic." He lays his finger on the very centre of Rahel's mental kinship with Goethe in saying that he has learned of her "to put all time into the power of the present moment" and to perceive that the present is "so mighty, so fascinating, just because it *is*."

Twenty years passed before Rahel saw Goethe again, during her stay at Frankfort in 1815. Brandes has pointed out with much subtlety how Rahel gave an unconscious illustration of her great, pure, and humble feeling for Goethe when, knowing Goethe was at Gerbermühle, she did not visit him, not wishing to force herself upon him: "I have received an infinity from him, and he nothing from me." But chance helped her in such a way that the meeting came about naturally, as she desired it. One day, when Goethe was making a pilgrimage to one of the beloved spots of his youth, Rahel saw him

driving by and cried out: "There 's Goethe!" She describes how she first turned crimson, then pale, how all her limbs trembled for half an hour afterwards, how she loved her eyes for having seen him! Thus Goethe found out that she was in the neighbourhood, and three days later he paid her a visit. She was in the act of dressing. "Sacrificing myself so as not to keep him waiting a moment," she hurried down in her dressing-gown. Afterwards she bitterly regretted having followed this impulse, for the consciousness of her "want of charm" made her more embarrassed than usual, so that, as at their former meeting, she was quite unable to show him the joy she felt. So it is, she continues, when after "so many years of love and life and prayer" one at last has a moment. But she felt that the mere presence of Goethe had given her the *accolade*, and that indeed no Olympian god could have made her prouder by his visit. And, when he had gone, she put on her best dress to show her enhanced self-consciousness. For, she says, "like Prince Louis I now feel, among brothers, worth ten thousand thalers more: Goethe has been to see me!"

Any one who, after this description, can compare Rahel's feeling for Goethe with that of any other

of his contemporaries, knows nothing either of feeling, or Rahel, or Goethe!

Ten years later Rahel saw Goethe for the last time, when, in 1825, she and Varnhagen visited him at Weimar in the course of a journey and spent a whole rich evening at his home. In describing the visit, after relating some girlish expressions of her admiration, Rahel concludes with the words: "When all is said and done, he truly flows in my blood." None of Rahel's contemporaries and no Goethe-worshipper that has succeeded her could have used these strong words with more truth, and yet they were no stronger than the reality of lifelong faith and love that they expressed.

What Gentz said of Rahel and romanticism—"You are romanticism itself, you were this before the word was invented"—may with equal truth be said of Rahel's cult of Goethe. It was Rahel's own inmost nature that determined her affinity to Goethe and to the Romantic School, so far as the latter coincided with the renaissance Goethe accomplished. Individualism, in art, in religion, in life, that was the import of this renaissance. Nay, this feature is so decisive that Lamprecht chose for the new mental attitude the word

*subjectivism* to designate it more completely. In *Werther*, *Götz*, *Stella*, Goethe opens the battle of the individual against ethical and æsthetic conventions, which the romanticists, Young Germany, and all so-called "spirits of revolt" in every land have carried on up to the present day. And even to-day it is above all through her subjectivism that Rahel is our contemporary.

To confute those who are now attempting to make Goethe into a Christian moralist we have not only an endless mass of direct evidence from his life and writings, we have also quantities of indirect evidence, among which that of Rahel, who never found any contradiction between his ethics and her own, is as strong as any. The watchword for his moral actions which Goethe announced when young in a letter to Lavater: "All your ideals will not lead me astray from being true and good and evil like Nature"—this watchword Goethe never abandoned, he only extended its import. And as after a thousand years a forest arises from the little winged seed, so has all the individualism of the new age, even Nietzsche's revaluation of ethical values, grown up from the fundamental view that lies in Goethe's youthful words just quoted. Above all in this

respect Rahel is of all Goethe's *contemporaries* the one who understood him most profoundly.

Rahel expresses the liveliest satisfaction when Goethe's works justify her in her conflict with the world, in her striving to attain essentiality, in her passion for the values that others called chimeras. In him she strengthens her own conviction that the all-important thing is "to be something," and that this takes a long time, that "we must not be in a hurry to be something." Of Goethe she learned the wisdom she imparted to a friend: that, when one has discovered one's real self, one ought first to plough up the field of one's soul, then let it become firm again slowly and of itself, and finally fertile, alike in "bad weather and fine weather." And that book of Goethe's which Rahel read most often, *Wilhelm Meister*, is the only great handbook for this kind of husbandry.

Rahel undoubtedly had to thank Goethe that she did not remain at variance with existence, but reached that purified love of life which is the noblest essence of sorrow. She, who in her youth thought it her fate to bleed to death owing to her Jewish nationality; she, who then possessed, in Goethe's judgment, stronger feelings than he had

observed in any one else, together with "the power of suppressing them at every instant"—how mournful, how deeply sunk in the darkness of her destiny Rahel might have become, if she had not breathed the liberating air of Goethe's world!

"What I have not received I can forget; but what has happened to me I cannot forget. God protect everyone from understanding this!"

Thus Rahel wrote in 1799, and in a certain sense it always remained true. But by degrees she learned in Goethe's school to submit to the law of life that he has expressed in the words: "Not only so much that is impossible, but also so much that is possible is withheld from us human beings."

Gradually Rahel learns to resign herself when faced by what is painfullest in her life and in that of humanity: she learns that we "fall like blossoms before the great, unknown wind," we, who might nevertheless have become fruits. "Calm thoughts and a great feeling for nature" help her to attain this resignation in face of the hardest of all: that "careless fate does not demand of us all that we might have accomplished."

In this resignation she received the greatest help from Goethe.

Through him she was born again, born to that kingdom where there is no question of Jew or Christian, woman or man, bond or free: the kingdom of the holy spirit.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SENSE OF BEAUTY

RAHEL'S æsthetic judgments are excellent examples of "thinking one's self into things," which Weininger appears to have called attention to as woman's weakness, while a young Swedish philosopher has endeavoured to prove that man also thinks with his feelings.[1]

Rahel's judgments are replete with mental pictures and complicated; a long development lies behind the few brief words in which she expresses her disapproval or her delight.

She rarely mentions the arts of painting and sculpture. In Paris, Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Dresden, Rahel had seen great art, and she has, in fact, expressed her admiration of Rembrandt and Dürer, amongst others. But the imitative arts had not nearly the same importance to her as the theatre, dancing, and music. Especially

[1] John Landquist, *Filosofiska Essayer*, 1906.

as regards the theatre Rahel exercised in her time an influence both direct and indirect. What she says about authors coming to see her, although she herself is no author, is also true of actors.

"As a rule people call upon authors; I am only a wretched reader, and the writers run after me."

Rahel probably no more tried her hand at the fashionable amusement of amateur-acting than she did at authorship. But her criticism was valued so highly that not only her friends among the actresses, but other theatrical artists asked her advice in difficult problems.

Above all Rahel, like the romanticists, tried to break down the Kotzebue-Iffland vogue, both directly by her criticism, and indirectly by demanding of authors and actors truth to nature, real passion, and psychological individualisation. An actor convinced her of the genuineness of his vocation if he "always and instantly found the nature of the thing," that is, of the character and state of mind of the personality he was to present, and in addition to this the correct means of expressing it. At this time it is, of course, impossible to verify the correctness of Rahel's judgment in questions of actors or musical performers; we can only enjoy the genuineness of her own indignation or enthusiasm.

She writes, for example, in 1793 of the singer Marchetti: "She has sung to me; she is the unique, amiable woman. I am beside myself. I too have paid my court to her. Her every movement is a charm, a magic, a madness of laughter or tears. Such singing, such cooing, such expression—there is only one expression. . . . This is passion, this is a gift of the gods, this is music, this is beauty."

And whatever art it may be that Rahel is enjoying at the moment, she always feels, when the artist is a genuine one, that he is "one of the elect of mankind," to whom she tenders all her warmest gratitude.

It was a necessary consequence of the circumstances of the time that Rahel, like all those who longed for greatness and truth on the stage, should be induced to overrate the *dramatic* element in Goethe's plays. With Schiller, on the other hand, she is clear-sighted, almost cool; she points out with justice that in certain of his dramas the orator speaks rather than the poet, and Schiller's imitators are her horror. Her knowledge of Shakespeare was profound, and in his humoristic-tragic representation of humanity she found a revelation of the very nature of art, of being "life in life," as well as "the deep-rooted Germanic tendency to introspection." Wherever

Rahel found a didactic one-sidedness, there she also found inadequate art. A drama, a novel, she says, must be a complete expression of the world; everything that appears there will be beautiful. But every genius sees there something different and represents it according to his temperament, gives it his colour, just as the old earth looks new in the light of every new day. Such are the works of great masters; everything that we can find in the world, we find in them; all great thoughts, but no dressed-up dummies of thought.

"A work of art must not always tell me what it means, but must show it at once."

"As the Greeks speak of men, as they always sum up everything to the uttermost limit and say it quite simply, so that it is perfectly great and sounds noble; they always leave everything as it is and merely view it and relate it."

Rahel never felt the need of the romantic school's alteration of æsthetic values; whatever was legitimate in this was already realised by Goethe, whose born ally Rahel was, while the one-sided dogmas of the romanticists inspired in her an indignation that was often "deep-cutting" in its expressions. All kinds of personal

satires, parodies, and travesties were intolerable to her, and it has already been pointed out that she abjured early in life the kind of wit that is indifferent how it may wound or where it may strike. Rahel's wit in daily life was the humorous play of colours made up of tears and sunshine. At times it was a cultural force, a searchlight that illuminated vanity or lying, stupidity or coarseness. But there is not one of Rahel's sallies that has the sheen of cold steel.

One thing that excites Rahel against the romantic school is its unjust criticism. When, for example, the romantic current of fashion leads A. W. Schlegel to disparage Racine, Rahel calls him "a dull, sick critic, who knows nothing of love." Again, in opposition to this dogmatic blindness, she instances how hard a Lessing, for instance, has had to fight for what "now may be put in plain words in any newspaper"; how unjust it is to detract from the importance of a champion of truth because the truth he strove for has now become "a commonplace"; how short-sighted it is to imagine that one is at liberty to despise Racine and Voltaire, because one has forgotten what the age they were compelled to live in was like.

Rahel insists strongly that mere bookmen, who have never taken part in life, are incapable of putting great vital force into their books, and that no one can understand the life of bygone times who does not transfer it to our own conditions — a thought as true as it is anti-romantic.

Rahel happily lacked what is called "a uniform view of art"—the kind of view that has never accomplished anything but a restriction of love and comprehension of art. In this respect a uniform æsthetic system operates like all other dogmatic theories, of which Rahel rightly says that they "dry and burn up the brain and annihilate the rest of the mental functions."

While thus the romantic theory first extolled and then depreciated Goethe, Rahel, both before and after the romantic school's cult of Goethe, approached his works with a reverence free from preconception: she did not wish, like the romantic school, to see in them a confirmation of her own theories, she only wanted a confirmation of Goethe. When the romanticists began to turn away from Goethe, she had done with them, and their ever-increasing tendency to Catholicism only inspired her with disgust.

Thus she wrote: "Friedrich Schlegel abuses Goethe; therefore he stays where he is and grows stupid." And to Varnhagen, who had quarrelled with A. W. Schlegel about Goethe, she wrote that he ought to have despatched Schlegel thus: "You are not the intelligent man I thought, in any respect, and you show only too plainly that you neither know nor see anything at all of Nature: and for that very reason you see nothing at all of Goethe. Good-bye."

"They first work themselves into a regular catholic, catalogic, chronological, post-mediæval, and historical mood, and then they set about assigning our eyes, and the Greeks, to their right place; and they try to put right those who have the senses they themselves lack. Senses, senses, our five senses!

The words last quoted were written by Rahel in connection with her admiration for Heinse, which was due to the very fact that he used his "right five senses" and possessed them to such a degree that he "inhaled and smelt" the picture he described. She admired, and recommended Varnhagen to study, Heinse's style, in which the words came "gushing forth in such pearl-like finish, with so little premeditation."

She admired in Heinse the complete independence with which he "had gathered everything into himself," from the slightest sensation to the most serious thoughts; whereby he did not adopt

anything even from the greatest masters "without transforming it into his own blood by some new insect- or lion-process."

Rahel's own assimilation was of this kind. This was the kind of originality she looked for, and loved when she found it.

Among the romanticists she respected and loved "unspeakably" Novalis, just on account of the depth of his individuality, the genuineness of his feeling. But when, impelled by the theories of romanticism, not by his own inmost soul, he wrote his *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* in opposition to Goethe, she condemned it absolutely as an expression of the profoundest error of the romantic school, the doctrine of "the poetry of poetry."

In this connection Rahel maintained that the productions of the romanticists were unpoetical precisely on account of their erroneous idea that poetry was not to be found in real life, where Goethe looked for it, but that it was necessary to invent "new subjects for poetry," subjects which produce nothing but emptiness and tediousness owing to their fantastical premeditation. To be a poet, says Rahel, is "to enclose a piece of life in a book," like Goethe.

"Poetry," says Rahel, "exists in Nature; that is, wherever our mind is able to become aware of anything free and significant; therefore also in the nature of the events of human life and consequently also in descriptions of the same."

Rahel values Kleist above all because he "is true and sees truly," and because she finds human nature, and its conflicts with real life, in his works, while romantic fantasies like those of Tieck were in a high degree unsympathetic to her.

But above all these words of Rahel's hit off a fundamental weakness of the romanticists: "To have talent one must have character; abilities and natural disposition by themselves make no talent." No doubt she had many friends among the pioneers of romanticism, but she never marched as a soldier in its ranks; she admired what was genuine in the movement, as in everything else, but her heart was not at home in that mediæval world: it belonged to great, sunny, productive Nature, to all the manifestations of life; she had the same love of health as her beloved Goethe. Art was to her a religious and sacred matter; but the simple relations of life, order and loyalty in performing them, cheerfulness in work and perseverance—all these qualities de-

spised by the romanticists, possessed in her eyes a religious consecration in the same, or perhaps a higher degree. That is to say, when they were the result of love for these life-values, and not of philistine mediocrity. She granted the right to set aside current morality, but only when this was brought about not by want of character, but by character. And by character Rahel means, in the creative artist, a pronounced intellectual individuality combined with a broad and well-thought-out view of the world and a conduct of life in agreement therewith. "*One cannot become an artist at six o'clock in the evening,*" she says of actors; "*one has to be one all day long.*" And for her the same held good of all artists.

It is one of Rahel's maxims that there is much more talent in the world than people think, but that it is hidden through want of courage to be one's self; this courage is the strength of all the great men, while their weak imitators forget themselves and try to present a world without themselves being in it!

"Courage . . . is everything, *that is, moral courage!* External heroic courage is a trifle, often petty. But inner courage and self-reliance before a world of prejudices, one's own and other people's—if you had that,

you would be just as cheerful in yourself, just as firm and just as sensible as I am. . . . The much-praised modesty of spirit is so seldom anything but a glorified moral cowardice." [In a letter to G. von Brinckmann.]

She writes golden words on the same subject to Varnhagen: "I should only wish to advise you to be altogether yourself; to work in a regular orgy of exuberance, to have full consideration for yourself, and to act as though you were alone in the world, or at least as though you spoke a language of your own and had first to wait and see whether any others might come and speak the same."

Rahel could never gather anything from the accounts of others, but only from the thing itself; she was unable "to learn anything from answers, to which she had not put the questions herself." She says too: "One notices at once whether people get their ideas from books or directly from the world, from Nature's own colours and forms." Rahel's "ignorance" causes her to employ no terminology, but spontaneous, self-made expressions; her inability to accept ready-made results makes her never use a set phrase but always give a point of view of her own. She lived in her favourite authors as she did in her most personal experiences; and all this made her judgments so essential, so quickening, that by

degrees they were spread among the whole of literary Germany. Her verbal and written utterances were quoted everywhere, and thus in many respects she had an important influence on the formation or transformation of the spirit of the age. Indeed, people were so intent upon getting her opinion that she often withheld it, since she was unwilling to increase the mass of unoriginal repetition or add stones to the burden which incompetence always has to bear. Moreover, Rahel's keen eye could even then see that criticism threatened a danger to production. "Berlin," she says, "is far too fond of polishing up its artistic feeling and lighting up its consciousness thereof with candles from every factory." She is afraid that intellectual weakness may be the result of thus forcing a way into "the most unconstrained depths of humanity." What indeed would she have said of the interviews and criticisms of our time?

She regarded herself as the most eminent of her contemporaries regarded her, as "one of the foremost critics of Germany." But *her* criticism was confined to a highly cultivated circle, the members of which she doubtless influenced individually, but only through the force of her

arguments. Public criticism, on the other hand, fixes the value or worthlessness of a production for a newspaper-reading public which is itself uncritical, and does this, not through the force of its *arguments*, but through the strength of its *position!* And this makes the greater part of modern public criticism a hindrance to culture, if personal faculty of judgment and intensified emotional life are to count as culture!

Rahel, like all whose relation to art is one of personal love, became more exacting with increasing years, while at the same time she retained her receptivity for everything new that was good.

In a letter, in which she describes Prince Pückler-Muskau's "true child's nature" in noticing and picking up everything new, she says: "It is corruption and not lack of understanding when a person is unwilling to absorb any new idea, inconvenient to himself; it is stupidity when such ideas present themselves to him and he does not notice that they are new; it is the greatest infamy when he recognises them and yet denies them."

Among other proofs of Rahel's unaltered receptivity is her great admiration for Victor Hugo and his "*sentiment du vrai*"; she calls his *Notre-Dame* a great masterpiece of Gothic architecture.

And after the age of sixty she still declares that she loves what she has always loved: air, flowers, fields, music, the theatre, discussion, that is, sociality, order, cleanliness, elegance, wit, consistency of thought, although it was no longer so easy for her to *find* all these things as it had been formerly.

And is it so, with us all? Yes, we may say that in youth most people's love of art is as wide and as shallow as a flooded meadow, but gradually alters its extent till it becomes as narrow and as deep as the well of an old castle.

Rahel perceived, with Schiller, that play is the child's demonstration of art and a thing as profoundly serious as the play of grown-up people—art. The play of the child and that of the artist, says Rahel, both have for their end the creation of a new existence, which cannot as yet be attained by any other means. But, in opposition to the romantic school, Rahel is not content with transforming existence in *art*, she wishes to transform existence itself to the beauty and harmony of which art gives the type. To a scheme of national art she wisely objects that *all* the artistic creations of a nation must be national; nay, they

cannot *avoid* being so; but that no talking about "a national art" can call such an art into being. For it is not created from a programme, but from "the healthiest, fullest feeling for nature, from innocent senses, that is, senses that have not been weakened through their education, and from an impressionable disposition," Even in its paraphrase, in Fouqué's *Sigurd*, the Nibelungen myth grips Rahel with such force that she has to put down the book and "talk aloud and moan . . . as if I had only seen Lady Macbeth or a set of Jews weeping the whole night long." But the powerful impression of this tragically human story did not make her abjure her hatred of "any other than the Olympian mythology, of Northern sagas, runes, and the like, and the new hope in the old gods of mist." As soon as this element becomes dominant and thrusts the human aside, her admiration is ended. And has not every experiment, the Nibelungen Ring included, confirmed the correctness of Rahel's instinct as regards the unserviceableness of these gods of mist? For in the "Ring" it is only the human beings who are gods!

Rahel insists that a nation's only task with regard to all kinds of creative activity is to give them

a free course, to see that they enjoy favourable conditions, and to protect them from over-zealous national vanity.

How completely Rahel inwardly dissociated herself from the romantic school is best seen in her most immediate manifestations of life, above all in her feeling for nature, which is surprisingly modern. For example, when Rahel wonders whether the earth itself is not perhaps a sentient being, which suffers from all the misery it is compelled to support and perhaps finds its consolation in a feeling of fellowship with all the other beings in space. Or when, after a ride on a donkey through a mountainous tract, she tries to explain the indescribable delight this ride has given her by the thought that in some earlier existence in Spain she may have taken just such a ride in pleasant company, an idea that in our time has found such profound expression in Lafcadio Hearn. Rahel had all her life, even in her youth, that feeling for nature to which the landscape becomes a state of the soul (*Amiel*). But she never weaves human situations or feelings into the landscape or into particular natural objects in the romantic way. As a rule the feeling for nature in the young is

always romantic in the sense that the young see themselves mirrored in nature, and indeed in life as a whole, and the mirror reflects the uneasiness, the longing, the happiness, or the revolt that fills their own souls. The more our innermost ego frees itself from our own destiny, the calmer we thus become; we are then ourselves a mirror to nature, and our relation to nature becomes at the same time a more impersonal and a more intimate one.

That Rahel passed through this development at an early age is perhaps one reason why her feeling for nature remained from early life even to the last the wholly direct one, which absorbs nature completely with all the senses and all the soul, without allowing a reflection, a feeling belonging to human life to interpose between itself and this immediate—one might almost say vegetative—sensation. Varnhagen tells us that during a journey through the Black Forest he had an opportunity of observing Rahel's "capacity for the highest enjoyment of nature." The strength and fulness with which she directly enjoyed mountains and waterfalls, meadows and trees, sunrises and stars, delighted Varnhagen as much as did nature itself.

I have referred in another connection to Rahel's

plant-like sensitiveness to atmospheric influences. She felt mild air literally as rebirth. The first of May she calls the most important day of the year, its birthday, and she cannot conceive why it was not made New Year's Day. She wonders whether her predilection for May is due to her having breathed its air when newly born, to the impressions of May having been the first to meet her eye on earth.

Rahel's short pictures of landscape are impressionist, purely impressions of the senses, but the essential ones, just those the picture leaves in the memory.

Thus, for instance, she describes how she showed the Prague Valley to Varnhagen and some friends in these words: ". . . I am as proud, when you delight in the view, as if I had made it myself, or discovered it and kept it for the enjoyment of my friends in light and shade, in scent, verdure, and vegetation. . . . The valley is more beautiful than ever. . . . Hazels, wild briars, cornflowers, oaks, beeches, and thousands of herbs press forward in their growth, more beautiful, richer, more luxuriant, calmer than ever, in the most golden sunshine, which floods this valley of the gods." . . .

"Round about, to an immeasurable distance, horizon beyond horizon; the most incredible play of light and shade over the cornfields." She describes how the

light plays upon the river that creeps like a beast through the valley; upon villages and farms, upon "dark, obstinate mountains. Sheep were feeding, timber was felled in the mountain woods and lay there, clean, dead and scented. . . . Bells, peace, everything."

At another time she rejoices in the thousand scents of the fields, the hemp, the hazels, the growing corn, and a sunshine "which regularly raged over the country with light and shade."

Or again, she delights in a garden, "where there was such a mad riot of flowers" that she had never seen the like. She enumerates fifteen arbours, among them a great bower of limes, flowering within and without, and all around a symphony of bees; millions of stocks, a little avenue of standard roses, and outside the garden broad fields with waving corn lit by the evening sun.

Prince Pückler-Muskau, famous for his original and knightly personality, his travels, his fine writings, his knowledge of the world and his gardens, belonged to Rahel's circle of friends during her later years. And on her visits to Muskau, where the prince had displayed all his genius in the art of horticulture, Rahel found an ideal existence: "Nothing is so good as Muskau," she says. She came straight out into what was to

her the "brewed, refreshing air"; she there found good friends, full freedom, enough solitude, enough amusement; she had her little Elise with her and finally there was "much for the eye and, since everything proceeds from diligence and thought, food for them too." These last words remind one of the garden conversations in *Elective Affinities*, and the whole reminds one of the time when a garden was what it is beginning to be again, material for artistic creation.

During her whole life, and especially as she grows older, Rahel feels that she gets more out of "children, verdure, fine eyes, the living word" than out of books. Flowers become her medicine. Thus her convalescence after a severe illness began with a basket of roses, sent her by Heine, and when she was given on her deathbed a branch of lilac with young leaves on it, she inhaled the fragrance of spring again and again, the last thing she enjoyed in life, "with deep breaths and in ecstasy."

These words written at random show Rahel's feelings at the death of Goethe: "Gentler than showers in May are children's kisses, the scent of roses, the notes of the nightingale and the trills of the lark. Goethe hears them no more. A great witness is gone."

These words of Rahel's harmonise closely with some of Goethe's own, which Rahel did not know, as they were written in his young days to Frau von Stein, melancholy words about the time when he would no more be able to enjoy the glory of the sun, the sky, and green things, while all these would shine over his grave. And how deeply would such an agreement as this have stirred Rahel, who felt "mad with joy" when she found in Goethe's autobiography that he and she had had similar feelings as children, their love of lightning, for instance, which in Rahel was so strong that she declared she hated people who were afraid of it. For just this agreement more than anything else proceeded from the inmost necessity of each. The most violent outburst of grief would have been a feeble expression of Rahel's feelings at Goethe's death in comparison with these quiet words. Nothing illustrates more clearly the depth both of Rahel's understanding of Goethe and of her own feeling for nature than the fact that, at the thought of his death, she suffers above all from his no longer being able to witness the reawakening of nature in spring.

## CHAPTER IX

### LETTERS

RAHEL wrote a fine and legible hand, just as she spoke in a clear and distinct voice. But it is certain that her written language is far inferior to her language of conversation, although one can see that the former has retained a good deal of the life of the spoken word, and this is shown perhaps by the very things that make her difficult to read, the irregularities of construction and punctuation, the interjections and exclamations. But she has succeeded in what she aimed at: in writing "conversations as they take living shape within one" —conversations which, as every one knows, do not shape themselves according to any laws of composition.

But Rahel might equally well have written letters, in which, as she says, "the soul wanders at will," and at the same time have made them easier of understanding. That her German was defi-

cient, that, as she complains, "anybody can write and talk better with much more stupid ideas," is no doubt one reason for the heaviness of her style. But the chief cause is to be found in her lack of the gift of form, a gift which might have impressed the artistic stamp even on such products of the mood of the moment as her letters. This deficiency is perhaps connected with the obstinate peculiarity which prevented Rahel, in her own words, from ever being able to learn anything from another. When Rahel speaks of her "gross ignorance" and says "nothing was taught me," this must not be taken to mean that she had had no *opportunity* of learning. On this point she has told us unambiguously that the cause lay within herself.

Thus,she adduces the following: "It is true that I always think of what is essential in what I read, and that to this end I only make the most rapid use possible of all means at my command, and then forget these means completely. . . . I arrange everything I hear or read into a whole. . . . All those who give me instruction begin by preaching something, which is always taken from a point of view from which *I do not* see this thing, and so they talk for hours without any connection so far as I am concerned. . . . Thus it has been with me with all my masters. . . .

"Our speech is our lived life; I have invented my

own, so that I have been able to make less use than many others of ready-made phrases; therefore mine are often rugged and faulty in all kinds of ways, but always genuine."

Rahel probably did not know a single date in the history of Greece, but she read Homer in Voss's translation; it made her declare that "the Odyssey seems to me so beautiful that it is positively painful," and she discovered that Homer is always great when he speaks of water, as Goethe is when he speaks of the stars. Probably she could not enumerate the rivers of Spain, but she knew Don Quixote. In a word, she was the very opposite of the kind of talent that passes brilliant examinations and is capable of carrying "completely undigested sentences in its head." What Rahel could not transform into blood of her blood did not concern her at all. There was such an indestructible "*connection between her abilities*," such an intimate "*co-operation between her temperament and her intelligence*," that there was no room in her for all the unoriginal ballast of which the views and opinions of most other people are made up: she could only keep and only give what was her own.

This is the incomparable charm of Rahel's

letters and their unique strength, in the face of which all weaknesses vanish.

It is natural that a Rahel should wonder whether we do not talk so much because we cannot express our inmost meaning; that she should hope that we may end by finding "the Word" that will include in itself all that is now unspeakable; that she should especially love those words which she found to contain "whole families of ideas."

For Rahel's own most felicitous words are just those that in some respect give expression to something hitherto unuttered; those of which one may say that they not only include a "family" but a whole nation of ideas.

Some one asked Rahel to give her opinion "quite naïvely." She answered that *she* could *promise* that and the opinion would still *be* naïve. For she knew that her originality was so rooted in her nature that nothing could damage it. And she says with reference to her letters: "I am quite unable to fashion myself after anything, for my raging heart fashions everything in and about me."

What is the effect of her not being able to write better German? Would she otherwise have really given her correspondents more than she did? Was

she even one of those who *ought* to have learned things as others learn them, whether she knew them or not? Surely not.

Rahel was one of those prophetic natures which always reach their knowledge by mysterious ways, as is related of Cassandra, who heard, saw, and understood everything from the moment she was found as a child on the floor of the temple, in the coils of a serpent that licked her ears.

In Rahel's time letter-writing was a social duty and a social art. Letters were, so to speak, the supplements of the newspaper press, for they circulated widely and fulfilled, in a refined and discreet way, functions which the press now performs in a very different manner. In those days people had leisure to take pains with their letters, since the thousand trivialities that now demand a dozen post cards and two dozen telephone calls a day did not consume the time and destroy the peace without which letter-writing cannot be developed into an art.

Rahel was a thorough child of her time in the importance she attached to letters and the pleasure they gave her. But, on the other hand, as a correspondent she was far more of an improviser

than most of her contemporaries. She is direct to such a degree that her letters sometimes resemble a stream of fire, sometimes a flood of tears, sometimes a play of sunlight flecked with shadows. In the face of such natural forces one forgets errors of grammar and punctuation. If one does not, one ought not to read Rahel. She is an infallible touchstone of human quality.

After receiving a letter of Rahel's Gentz writes: "Do men write thus? No! Nor gods either! Beings intermediate between gods and men, childlike great spirits, sublime children, souls in which the whole world at once, with its heights and depths, is ever mirrored, which shake down the greatest thoughts and the greatest emotions like hazel-nuts from their ever-teeming bushes and throw them into common life. . . . In every word the world blossoms. . . .

"They [the letters] are living human beings, which move along with beautiful, dear, tender hands, little feet, godlike eyes, and especially godlike red lips." . . . And Rahel herself quotes with approval another expression of Gentz's, that her letters are like "fresh, aromatic strawberries, to which, however, mould and roots are still hanging," since the plant has just been plucked out of the ground.

Her letters touch upon a multitude of subjects. There is nothing methodical about them; great and little subjects come pell-mell, one after an-

other; she writes of what interests her at the moment and the assertion that she "can talk about Kant and new hats in the same breath" is almost literally true. A French critic who has called her "at the same time simple and complicated, universal and original, as open as Nature and like her a mystery" sums up herein the impressions he has received from her letters. It is always nature that she recalls, by the incalculability, the inexhaustibility, the originality, and the vital force of her utterances. And nature forms the background of them all. She often begins her letters with a description of the weather in two or three lines, a description so full of essentiality that it throws one at once into just that frame of mind which such weather produces. "Father Ether" is to her, as to Hölderlin, the most important of the gods: "Fine weather and climate is the most beautiful thing on earth. It is a real god. One can and ought only to enjoy it and feel it," she writes.

She says with truth that "in the history of my life the weather and my health must have their place." Her physical susceptibility and sensitiveness are so strong that "too thick, too thin, too warm, or too cold air" makes her ill, while a

due agreement between herself and the air is a conscious delight. We can see how Rahel finally reached a point where she "asked nothing of life but some sort of a correspondence with the atmosphere." And we can only understand Rahel's letters by allowing for the strength of the atmospheric influence which affected her mood at the time of writing.

The weather conditions that are described at the beginning of the letters[1] are not the only conditions that determine them. Rahel can only write, she says, when "a certain kindling takes place within her." But the slightest thing may check the flow of this humour, a bad pen, for instance, or a trembling of the hand. Words, expressions, form, train of thought, construction, all are affected by it, and her style is, according to circumstances, rugged, flowing, playful, or calm.

But above all we must remember that all persons sensitive to this extent are also creatures of instinct; that their sympathy or antipathy is decided with the rapidity of lightning; that their eye

[1] Here are some examples, in March: "Snow on the roofs and in the streets. But it is already disappearing; the thick clouds are parting; brightness, if not sunshine, pierces through." Or in December: "Gloomy, grey, damp autumn weather; warmish, undecided temperature. Very black streets."

speaks before their thoughts; that their feelings are so strong that he who regards the expression of these feelings as adequate to the *facts*, whereas it is only adequate to such person's impression of the facts, will be misled with regard to the facts.

Depth of sensibility, susceptibility of the senses, delicacy of instinct, penetration of thought are all combined in that prophetic state of mind, that lion's spring, with which Rahel's feeling seizes its object.

"Feeling is much more delicate than thought," she says, and she relies blindly upon feeling, even when she allows thought to collect arguments in support of it.

These arguments may be more or less good: feeling itself is always the valuable element, often the infallible guide, in Rahel's subjective judgment. The objective value others assign to it depends, of course, upon the reliance each one has in Rahel's instinct for value or non-value. I for my part doubt the judgment of those who do not perceive the divinatory certainty in Rahel's.

And even if Rahel's opinions may be contradicted, of what importance is that compared with the radiant honesty and genuineness with which

in these wonderful letters she sends her whole soul "for the enjoyment and use" of her friends?

Rahel's letters and a number of aphorisms, of which some were published in reviews during her lifetime, are her only contributions to literature. The fact that she once calls these aphorisms *Results à la Chamfort* is no evidence at all of her having taken Chamfort, as some have assumed, as her special model. French literature can show earlier and greater authors in this department, authors whom Rahel knew well, and she always admired French elegance and lucidity of expression, qualities which she did not herself possess.

But even if no one before Rahel had written in aphoristic form, *she* would have been led to do so. For this form was her natural and necessary mode of expression, as it is that of all poets without the gift of poetry and of all thinkers without the inclination to systematising. She herself best characterised her literary productions in the words: "They were shot out by explosions, there are jewels among them."

Varnhagen published after Rahel's death a selection of her letters with the title: *Rahel, a Memorial for her*

*Friends*, and with the motto from Hölderlin's *Hyperion: Still und bewegt* (calm and emotional). Afterwards his niece, Ludmilla Assing, published the pamphlet, *Aus Rahels Herzensleben*. Besides these there are Rahel's complete correspondence with David Veit and her correspondence with Varnhagen. For those who cannot spare the time to read through all this, I recommend as a companion and complement to my delineation the condensation of Varnhagen's book, edited by Dr. Hans Landsberg (in the *Renaissance-Bibliothek*, published by L. Simion, Berlin, 1904).

Varnhagen published Rahel's letters as "a memorial for her friends." But he felt that the book would have a wider circle of readers and a more enduring influence. He expresses the hope that when the German nation returns to "the beautiful origins of its intellectual culture," Rahel will be rightly understood; it will then be seen that in her everything is "significant and important," since her original and pure nature showed itself in everything, from her care and orderliness in the smallest everyday matters to her thoughts on the highest things. But Varnhagen does not regard this return as the only preliminary condition of a true understanding of Rahel: it is also necessary that the conventional morality be discarded; that love and marriage be looked at from

other points of view; that honour give place to shame and shame to honour. Not till then, Varnhagen thinks, will the pages be rightly understood in which Rahel reveals herself, freely and grandly, wonderful in the purity of her freedom from prejudice, in her elevation above "all prudery and hypocrisy," true and open, frankly confessing what others have kept to themselves.

Has this time yet arrived, or is Rahel still before the age?

Rahel's letters reveal herself from early youth.

"Tears, splendour, and fury" are characteristic of her whole life, above all the earlier part of it. She never attains that harmony which can only be given by a perfect happiness.

But she attains the equilibrium which results when we have succeeded in *forgiving*, if not in *understanding* existence. It is this inward development that we witness in her letters. Varnhagen, who could say with truth that he knew about Rahel all that one person can know of another, signalised her as the most innocent, tender, pure, delicate, upright, and pious person he had ever known; the most chaste in the highest sense of the word; he declared that the genuineness

that underlay all Rahel's life and actions was so great that beside her all others appeared commonplace. "Indeed," he wrote in this connection,[1] "all her genius and talent, mighty as they are, vanish before the gushing life in her breast." It is true that she has "acuteness, wit, imagination, sense, a pure, enthusiastic view, the noblest veracity. But," he concludes, "the innocence and naïveté of this truthful human heart are the most beautiful things my eyes have ever beheld."

Every one who has come to know Rahel closely will agree with Varnhagen.

Rahel's individuality has the most rigid limits and her sympathy the most delicate understanding; she is sensuous with the most susceptible receptivity, and every nerve in her sensitive organism is in the power of the soul; she is a sexual being in every drop of her blood, and at the same time a "*Vollmensch*," in whom the man's mental power, the child's innocence, and the woman's depth of feeling are in complete equilibrium. Her inmost being is calm and her external existence is a genial intercourse. She is rationalist and mystic, individualist and altruist.

[1] To Goethe.

She is an aristocrat and a democrat. And she is none of these temporarily or by turns, but all of them at the same time and at every period of her existence. In a word, she was one of those who have already reached the third kingdom, where sundering fortuity has given place to the essential, and apparently irreconcilable contradictions have merged in a higher state, in which man is individual and externally active, splendid in himself, and broad-hearted in his sympathies, heathen and Christian, genius and kindness, senses and soul!

Already the onlooker is nearer to this synthesis than the active and creative. Rahel is one of the former. And thereby she represents the highest value women have yet brought into culture, that of being the "ancestors" of the holy spirit.

I have elsewhere[1] maintained that the leading characteristic of the soulful person is the connection and co-operation between his different qualities. Even from this point of view Rahel is one of the exceptionally soulful. But she is so not only through this connection and co-operation between already existing spiritual gifts, she also foreshadows a future and more soulful mode of

[1] In *Lifslinjer II.* (*Lebensglaube*): on the Evolution of the Soul.

existence. Her unique sensibility, her visionary gift of divination, her quick-sightedness, her certainty of instinct are manifestations of a spiritual force to which at present only the exceptional being has attained, but which the race may perhaps finally acquire. Her soul has great, new gestures; new and deeper tones of feeling vibrate in her cries of joy and anguish; she has found words for hitherto unspoken inner experiences and her silence conceals secrets yet unsuspected, with which her lips already tremble.

Nietzsche describes the impression he once received when, without seeing the singer, he only heard a deep, fine contralto voice. "We at once imagine," he says, "that somewhere in the world there may be women with lofty, heroic, royal souls, able and ready to make grandiose remonstrances, resolutions and self-sacrifices, able and ready for lordship over men, since what is best in man, apart from sex, has become in them an incarnate ideal."

Rahel's deep contralto voice is such a prophecy, and at the same time a confirmation, of this great dream of the woman of the future.

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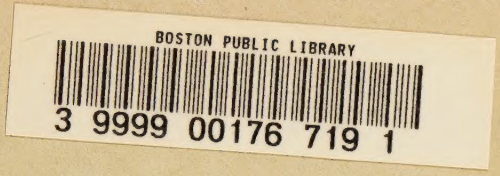


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